This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

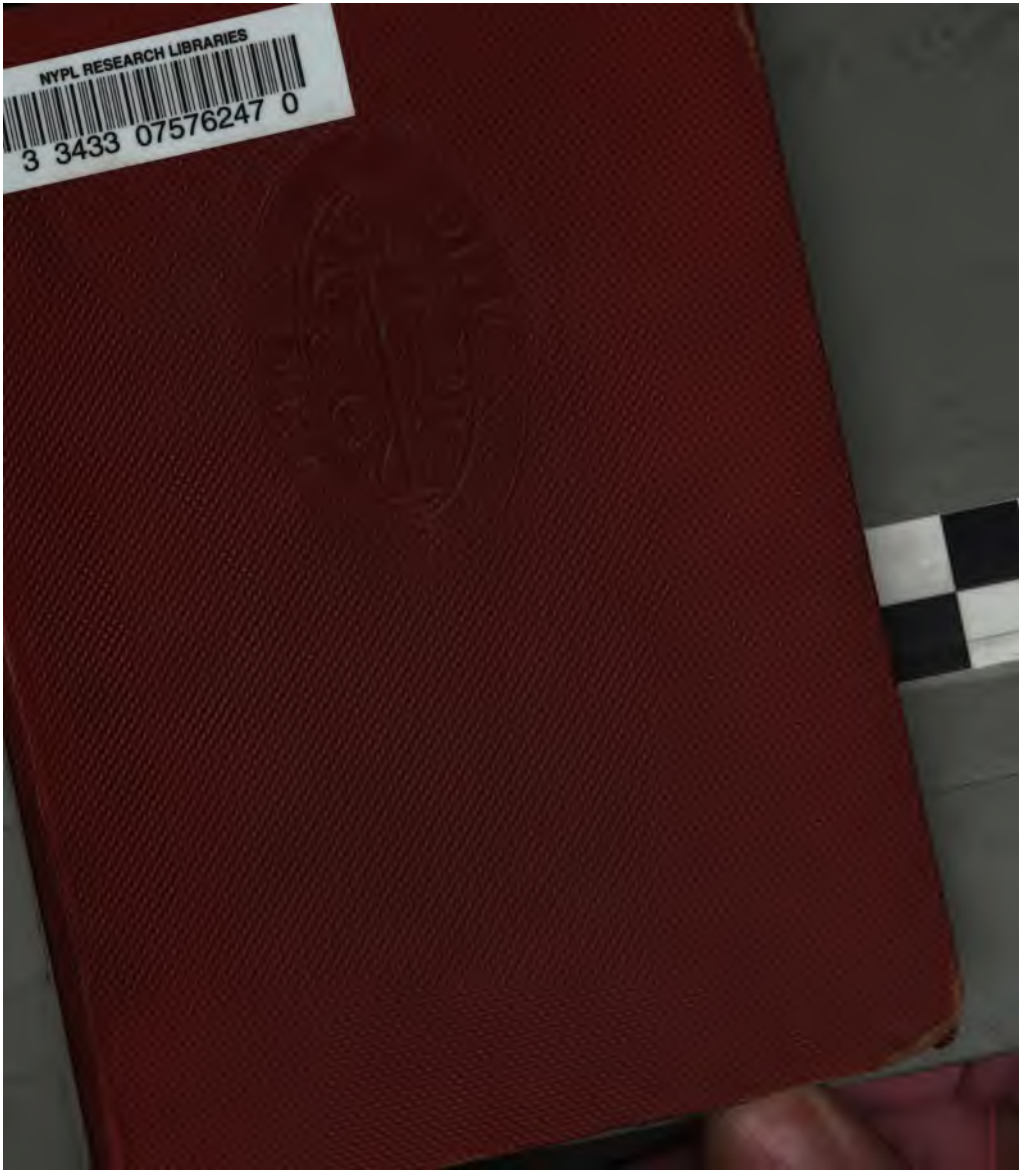
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07576247 0

Elliot
NCW

No Series Cards Made

THE ITALIANS.

BY

FRANCES ELLIOT,

AUTHOR OF

"THE DIARY OF AN IDLE WOMAN IN ITALY," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1875.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
396253A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1928 L

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

PART III.

			Page
CHAPTER	I.	A Lonely Town	9
—	II.	What Silvestro says	25
—	III.	What came of Burning the Marchesa's Papers	42
—	IV.	What a Priest should be	59
—	V.	"Say not too much"	63
—	VI.	The Contract	83
—	VII.	The Club at Lucca	102
—	VIII.	Count Nobili's Thoughts	127
—	IX.	Nera	135

PART IV.

—	I.	Waiting and Longing	161
—	II.	A Storm at the Villa	178
—	III.	Between Life and Death	184
—	IV.	Fra Pacifico and the Marchesa	199
—	V.	To be, or not to be?	210
—	VI.	The Church and the Law	229

		Page
CHAPTER VII.	The Hour strikes	236
— VIII.	For the Honour of a Name	250
— IX.	Husband versus Wife	257
— X.	The Lawyer baffled	271
— XI.	Face to Face	281
— XII.	Oh Bello!	299

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

A Lonely Town.

The road from Lucca to Corellia lies at the foot of lofty mountains, overmantled by chestnut forests, and cleft asunder by the river Serchio—the broad wilful Serchio, sprung from the flanks of virgin fastnesses. In its course a thousand valleys open up, scoring the banks. Each valley has its tributary stream, down which, even in the dog-days, cool breezes rustle. The lower hills lying warm towards the south, and the broad grassy lands by the river, are trellised with vines. Some fling their branches in wild festoons on mulberry or aspen-trees. Some trained in long arbours are held up by pillars of unbarked wood; others trail upon the earth in delicious luxuriance. The white and purple grapes peep from the already shrivelled leaves, or hang in rich masses on the brown earth.

It is the vintage. The peasants, busy as bees, swarm on the hill-sides; the women pluck the fruit; the men bear it away in wooden measures. While they work, they sing those wild Tuscan melodies

that linger in the air like long-drawn sighs. The donkeys, too, climb up and down, saddled with wooden panniers, crammed with grapes. These grapes are shot into large tubs, and placed in a shady outhouse. Some black-eyed boy will dance merrily on these tubs, by-and-by, with his naked feet, and squeeze out the juice. This juice is then covered and left to ferment, then bottled into flasks, covered with wicker-work, corked with tow, and finally stowed away in caves among the rocks.

The Marchesa's lumbering coach, drawn by three horses harnessed abreast (another horse, smaller than the rest, put in tandem in front), creaks along the road by the riverside, on its high wheels. She sits within, a stony look upon her hard white face. Enrica, pale and silent, is beside her. No word has passed between them since they left Lucca two hours ago. They pass groups of peasants, their labours over for the day,—turning out of the vineyards upon the high-road. The donkeys are driven on in front. They are braying for joy, their faces are turned homeward. Boys run at their heels, and spur them on with sticks and stones. The women lag behind talking,—their white head-gear and gold ear-rings catching the low sunshine that strikes through rents of parting

mountains. Every man takes off his hat to the Marchesa; every woman wishes her good day.

It is only the boys who do not fear her. They have no caps to raise; when the carriage has passed, they leave the donkeys and hang on behind like a swarm of bees. The driver is quite aware of this, and his long whip, which he has cracked at intervals all the way from Lucca,—would reach the grinning, white-toothed little vagabonds well; but he,—the driver, grins too, and spares them.

Together they all mount the zig-zag mountain-pass, that turns short off from the right bank of the valley of the Serchio, towards Corellia. The peasants sing choruses as they trudge upwards, taking short cuts among the trees at the angles of the zig-zag. The evening lights come and go among the chestnut trees and on the soft short grass. Here a fierce flick of sunshine shoots across the road;—there deep gloom darkens an angle into which the coach plunges, the peasants, grouped on the top of a bank overhead, standing out darkly in the yellow glow.

It is a lonely pass in the very bosom of the Apennines, midway between Lucca and Modena. In Winter the road is clogged with snow; nothing can pass. Now, there is no sound but the singing of waterfalls, and the trickle of watercourses, the

chirrup of the *cicala*, not yet gone to its rest,—and the murmur of the hot breezes rustling in the distant forest.

No sound,—save when sudden thunderpelts wake awful echoes among the great brotherhood of mountain tops,—when torrents burst forth, pouring downwards, flooding the narrow garden ledges, and tearing away the patches of corn and vineyard, the people's food. Before,—behind,—around,—arise peaks of purple Apennines, cresting upwards into the blue sky—an earthen sea dashed into sudden breakers, then struck motionless. In front, in solitary state, rises the lofty summit of La Pagna, casting off its giant mountain-fellows right and left, which fade away into a golden haze towards Modena.

High up overhead, crowning a precipitous rock, stands Corellia, a knot of browned, sun-baked houses, flat-roofed, open-galleried, many-storied, nestling round a ruined castle, athwart whose rents the ardent sunshine darts. This ruined castle and the tower of an ancient Lombard church, heavily arched and galleried with stone, gleaming out upon a surface of faded brickwork,—form the outline of the little town. It is enclosed by solid walls, and entered by an archway so low that the Marchesa's driver has to dismount as he passes through. The

heavy old carriage rumbles in with a hollow noise; the horses' hoofs strike upon the rough stones with a harsh, loud sound.

The whole town of Corellia belongs to the Marchesa. It is an ancient fief of the Guinigi. Legend says that Castruccio Castracani was born here. This is enough for the Marchesa. As in the Palace of Lucca, she still—even at lonely Corellia—lives as it were under the shadow of that great ancestral name.

Lonely Corellia! Yes, it is lonely! The church bells, high up in the Lombard tower sound loudly the Matins and the Eventide. They sound louder still on the Saints' days and festivals. With the festivals pass Summer and Winter, both dreary to the poor. Children are born, and marriage flutes wake the echoes of the mountain solitudes—and mothers weep, hearing them, remembering their young days and present pinching want. The aged groan, for joy to them comes like a fresh pang!

The Marchesa's carriage passes through Corellia at a foot's pace. The driver has no choice. It is most difficult to drive at all—the street is so narrow, and the doorsteps of the houses jut out so into the narrow space. The horses, too, hired at Lucca, twenty miles away, are tired, poor beasts, and reeking with the heat. They can hardly keep their feet

upon the rugged, slippery stones that pave the dirty alley. As the Marchesa passes slowly by, wan-faced women,—coloured handkerchiefs gathered in folds upon their heads, knitting or spinning flax cut from the little field without upon the mountain side,—put down the black curly-headed urchins that cling to their laps—rise from where they are resting on the doorstep, and salute the Marchesa with an awe-struck stare. She, in no mood for condescension, answers them with a frown. Why have these wan-faced mothers, with scarce bread to eat, children between their knees? Why has God given her none? Again the impious thought rises within her which tempted her when standing before the marriage-bed in the nuptial chamber. "God is my enemy." "He has smitten me with a curse." "Why have I no child?" "No child, nothing but her"—and she flashes a savage glance at Enrica, who has sunk backwards, covering her tear-stained face with a black veil, to avoid the peering eyes of the Corellia townsfolk—"Nothing but her. Born to disgrace me. Would she were dead! Then all would end, and I should go down—the last Guinigi—to an honoured grave."

The sick, too, are sitting at the doorways as the Marchesa passes by. The mark of fever is on many an ashy cheek. These sick have been car-

ried from their beds to breathe such air as evening brings. (Air! There is no air from heaven in these foul streets. No sweet breath circulates;—no Summer scents of grasses and flowers reach the lonely town hung up so high. The Summer sun scorches. The icy winds of Winter, sweeping down from Alpine ridges, whistle round the walls. Within are chilly, desolate hearths, on which no fire is kindled.) These sick, as the carriage passes, turn their weary eyes, and lift up their wasted hands in mute salutations to that dreaded mistress who is lord of all—the great Marchesa. Will they not lie in the Marchesa's ground when their hour comes? —Alas! how soon—their weakness tells them very soon!—Will they not be carried in an open bier up those long flights of steps—all hers—cut in the rocky sides of overlapping rocks, to the cemetery, darkly shaded by waving cypresses? The ground is hers,—the rocks, the steps, the stones,—the very flowers that brown skinny hands will sprinkle on their bier—all hers. From birth to bridal, and the marriage bed (so fruitful to the poor), from bridal to death, all hers—The land they live on, and the graves they fill. All—but a shadow of her greatness!

At the corner of the squalid, ill-smelling street through which she is now passing, is the town-foun-

tain. This fountain,—once a wilful mountain torrent, now cruelly captured and borne hither by municipal force, splashes downwards through a sculptured circle cut in a marble slab, into a covered trough below. Here bold-eyed maidens are gathered, who poise copper vessels on their dark heads—maidens who can chat and laugh and romp on holidays, and with flushed faces dance wild tarantellas (fingers for castanets), where the old tale of love is told in many a subtle step, and shuffle, rush, escape, and feint,—ending in certain capture! Beside the maidens linger some mountain lads. Now their work is over, they loll against the wall, pipe in mouth, or lie stretched on a plot of grass that grows green under the spray of the fountain. In a dark angle, a little behind from these, there is a shrine hollowed out of the city wall. Within the shrine an image of the Holy Mother of the Seven Sorrows stands,—her arms outstretched, her bosom pierced by seven gilded arrows. The shrine is protected by an iron grating. Bunches of pale hillside blossoms, ferns, and a few blades of corn, are thrust in between the bars. Some lie at the Virgin's feet—offerings from those who have nothing else to give. A little group (but these are old, and bowed by grief and want) kneel beside the shrine in the quiet evening-tide.

The rumble of a carriage, so strange a sound in lonely Corellia, rouses all. From year to year, no wheels pass through the town save the Marchesa's. Ere she appears, all know who it must be. The kneelers at the shrine start up and hobble forward to stare and wonder at that strange world from whence she comes,—so far away at Lucca. The maidens curtsey and smile; the lads jump up, and range themselves respectfully against the wall; yet in their hearts neither care for her—neither the maidens nor the lads,—no one cares for the Marchesa. They are all looking out for Enrica. Why does the Signorina lie back in the carriage a mass of clothes? The maidens would like to see how those clothes are made, to cut their poor garments something like them. The lads would like to let their eyes rest on her golden hair. Why does the Signorina Enrica not nod and smile to those she knows, as is her wont? Has that old tyrant her aunt—these young ones are bold, and dare to whisper what others think; they have no care, and, like the lilies of the field, live in the wild, free air —Has that old tyrant, her aunt, bewitched her?

Now the carriage has emerged from the dark alley, and entered the dirty but somewhat less dark piazza—the marked-place of Corellia. The old Lombard church of Santa Barbara, with its big bells in

the arched tower, hanging plainly to be seen, opens into the piazza by a flight of steps and a sculptured doorway. The Municipio too, calling itself *a palace* (heaven save the mark!), with its list of births, deaths, and marriages posted on a black board outside the door, to be seen of all,—adorns it. The Café of the Tricolor, and such shops as Corellia boasts of, are there opposite. Men, smoking, and drinking native wine, are lounging about. Ser Giacomo, the notary, spectacles on nose, sits at a table in a corner, reading aloud to a select audience a weekly broadsheet published at Lucca, news of men and things not of the mountain-tops. Every soul starts up as they hear wheels approaching. If a bomb had burst in the piazza the panic could not be greater. They know it is the Marchesa. They know that now the Marchesa is come she will grind and harry them, and seize her share of grape, and corn, and olive to the uttermost farthing. Silvestro, her steward, a timid, pitiful man, can be got over by soft words, and the sight of want and misery. Not so the Marchesa. They know that now she is come she will call the town-council,—fine them,—pursue them for rent,—cite them to the High Court of Barga,—imprison them if they cannot pay. They know her, and they curse her. The ill-news of her arrival runs from

lip to lip. Checco, the butcher, who sells his meat cut into dark, indescribably-shaped scraps, more fit for dogs than men—first sees the carriage turn into the Piazza. He passes the word on to Oreste, the barber round the corner. Oreste, who, with his brother Pilade, both wearing snow-white aprons, are squaring themselves at their open doorway, over which hangs a copper basin, shaped like Manbrino's helmet, looking for customers,—Oreste and Pilade turn pale. Then Oreste tells the baker, Pietro, who, naked as nature made him, has run out from his oven to the open door, for a breath of air. The bewildered clerk at the Municipio, who sits and writes and sleeps by turns, all day, in a low room beside a desk, taking notes for the Sindaco (Mayor) from all who come—(he is so tired, that clerk, he would hear the last trumpet sound unmoved), even he hears the news, and starts up.

Now the carriage stops. It has drawn up in the centre of the piazza. It is the Marchesa's custom. She puts her head out of the window, and takes a long, grave look all round. These are her vassals. They fear her. She knows it, and she glories in it. Every head is uncovered, every eye turned upon her. It is obviously some one's duty to salute her and to welcome her to her domain. She has stopped for this purpose. It is always

done. No one however stirs. Ser Giacomo, the notary, bows low beside the table where he has been caught reading the Lucca broadsheet; but Ser Giacomo does not stir. How he wishes he had stayed at home!

He has not the courage to move one step towards her. Something must be done, so Ser Giacomo he runs and fetches the Sindaco from inside the recesses of the café, where he is playing dominoes under a lighted lamp. The Sindaco must give the Marchesa a formal welcome. The Sindaco, a saddler by trade—a snuffy little man, with a face drawn and yellow as parchment, wearing his working clothes—advances to the carriage with a step as cautious as a cat.

"I trust the illustrious Lady is well," he says timidly, bowing low and trying to smile. Mr. Sindaco is frightened, but he can be proud enough to his fellow-townsfolk,—and he is downright cruel to that poor lad his clerk, at the Municipal Palace.

The Marchesa, with a cold, distant air, that would instantly check any approach to familiarity —if anyone were bold enough to be familiar—answers gravely, "That she is thankful to say she is in her usual health."

The Sindaco,—although better off than many, painfully conscious of long arrears of unpaid rent,

—waxing a little bolder at the sound of his own voice and his well-chosen phrases, continues,

"I am glad to hear it, Signora Marchesa." The Sindaco further observes, "That he hopes for the illustrious lady's indulgence and good-will."

His smile has faded now; his voice trembles. If his skin were not so yellow, he would be white all over, for the Marchesa's looks are not encouraging. The Sindaco dreads a summons to the High Court of Barga, where the provincial prisons are,—with which he may be soon better acquainted, he fears.

In reply, the Marchesa—who perfectly understands all this in a general way—scowls, and fixes her rigid eyes upon him.

"Signor Sindaco, I cannot stop to listen to any grievance now; I will promise no indulgence. I must pay my bills. You must pay me, Signor Sindaco—that is but fair."

The poor little snuffy Mayor bows a dolorous acquiescence. He is hopeless, but polite—like a true Italian, who would thank the hangman as he fastens the rope round his neck. But the Marchesa's words strike terror into all who hear them. All owe her long arrears of rent, and much besides. Why—oh! why—did the cruel lady come to Corellia?

Having announced her intentions in a clear,

metallic voice, the Marchesa draws her head back into the coach.

"Send Silvestro to me," she adds, addressing the Sindaco. "Silvestro will inform me of all I want to know." (Silvestro is her steward.)

"Is the noble young Lady Enrica unwell?" asks the persevering Sindaco, gazing earnestly through the window.

He knows his doom. He has nothing to hope from the Marchesa's clemency, so he may as well gratify his burning curiosity by a question about the much-beloved Enrica, who must certainly have been ill-used by her aunt to keep so much out of sight.

"The people of Corellia would also offer their respectful homage to her," bravely adds Mr. Sindaco, tempting his fate. "The Lady Enrica is much esteemed here in the town."

As he speaks the Sindaco gazes in wonder at the muffled figure in the corner. Can this be she? Why does she not move forward and answer? and show her pretty face, and approve the people's greeting?

"My niece has a headache; leave her alone," answers the Marchesa, curtly. "Do not speak to her, Signor Sindaco. She will visit Corellia another day; meanwhile, adieu."

The Marchesa waves her hand majestically, and signs for him to retire. This the Sindaco does with an inward groan at thought of what is coming on him.

Poor Enrica, feeling as if a curse were on her, cutting her off from all her former life,—shrinks back deeper into the corner of the carriage, draws the black veil closer about her face, and sobs aloud. The Marchesa turns her head away. The driver cracks his long whip over the steaming horses, which move feebly forwards with a jerk. Thus the coach slowly traverses the whole length of the Piazza, the wheels rumbling themselves into silence out in a long street leading to another gate on the further side of the town.

Not another word more is said that night among the townsfolk; but there is not a man at Corellia who does not curse the Marchesa in his heart. Ser Giacomo, the notary, folds up his newspaper in dead silence, puts it into his pocket, and departs. The lights in the dark café, which burn sometimes all day when it is cloudy, are extinguished. The domino-players disappear. Oreste and Pilade shut up their shop despondingly. The baker Pietro comes out no more to cool at the door. Anyway, there must be bakers, he reflects, to bake the bread; so Pietro retreats, comforted, to his oven, and works

frantically all night. He is safe, Pietro hopes, though he has paid no rent for two whole years, and has sold some of the corn which ought to have gone to the Marchesa.

Meanwhile the heavy carriage, with its huge leather hood and double rumble, swaying dangerously to and fro, descends a steep and rugged road embowered in forest, leading to a narrow ledge upon the summit of a line of cliffs. On the very edge of these cliffs, formed of a dark red basaltic stone, the Marchesa's villa stands. A deep, dark precipice drops down beneath. Opposite is a range of mountains, fair and forest-spread on the lower flanks, rising above into wild crags, and broken, blackened peaks, that mock the soft blue radiance of the evening sky.

CHAPTER II.

What Silvestro says.

SILVESTRO, the steward, is a man "full of conscience," as people say, deeply sensible of his responsibilities, and more in dread of the Marchesa than of the Church. It is this dread that makes him so emaciated—hesitate when he speaks, and bend his back and shoulders into a constant cringe. But for this dread, Silvestro would forgive the poor people more. He sees such pinching misery every day—lives in it—suffers from it; how can he ask those for money who have none? It is like forcing blood out of a stone. He is not the man to do it. Silvestro lives at hand; he hears the rattle of the hail that burns the grapes up to a cinder,—the terrible din of the thunder before the forked lightning strikes the cattle; he sees with his own eyes the griping want of bread in the savage Winter time; his own eyes behold the little lambs, dead of hunger, lying by the roadside. Worse still, he sees other lambs—human lambs with Christian souls—fade and pine and shrink into a little grave, from failing of mother's milk, dried up for want of proper food.

He sees, too, the aged die before God calls them, failing through lack of nourishment—a little wine, perhaps, or a mouthful of soup;—the young and strong grow old with ceaseless striving. Poor Silvestro! he sees too much. He cannot be severe. He is born merciful. Silvestro is honest as the day, but he hides things from the Marchesa; he is honest, but he cannot—no, he cannot—grind and vex the poor, as she would have him do. Yet she has no one to take his place in that God-forgotten town—so they pull on, man and mistress—a truly ill-matched pair—pull on, year after year. It is a weary life for him when the great lady comes up for her villeggiatura—Silvestro, divided, cleft in twain, so to say, as he is, between his awe and respect for the Marchesa and her will, and his terrible sympathy for all suffering creatures, man or beast.

As to the Marchesa, she despises Silvestro too profoundly to notice his changing moods. It is not her habit to look for anything but obedience—absolute obedience—from those beneath her. A thousand times she has told herself such a fool would ruin her; but, up to this present time, she has borne with him, partly from convenience, and partly because she fears to get a rogue in his place. She does not guess how carefully Silvestro has hid

the truth from her; she would not have given him credit for the power of concealing anything.

The Sindaco, having sent a boy up to Silvestro's house with the Marchesa's message, "that he is to attend her," the steward comes hurrying down through the terraces cut in the steep ground behind the villa—broad, stately terraces, with balustrades, and big empty vases, and statues, and grand old lemon-trees set about. Great flights of marble steps cross and re-cross, rest on a marble stage, and then re-cross again. Here and there a pointed cypress-tree towers upwards like a green pyramid in a desert of azure sky. Bright-leaved Autumn flowers lie in masses on the rich brown earth, and dainty streamlets come rushing downwards in little sculptured troughs.

What a dismal sigh Silvestro gave when he got the Marchesa's message, and knew that she had arrived! How he wrung his hands and looked hopelessly upwards to heaven with vacant, colourless eyes, the big heat-drops gathering on his bald, wrinkled forehead! He has so much to tell her!—It must be told too; he can hide the truth no longer. She will be sure to ask to see the accounts. Alas! alas! what will his mistress say? For a moment Silvestro gazes wistfully at the mountains all around with a vacant stare. Oh! that the mountains would

cover him! Anyway, there are caves and holes, he thinks, where the Marchesa's wrath would never reach him; caves and holes where he might live hidden for years, cared for by those who love him. Shall he flee, and never see his mistress's dark, dreadful eyes again? Folly!

Silvestro rouses himself. He resolves to meet his fate like a man, whatever that may be. He will not forsake his duty.—So Silvestro comes hurrying down by the terraces, upon which the shadows fall, to the house—a grey mediæval tower, machicolated and turreted—the only remains of a strong fortress that in feudal times guarded these passes from Modena into Tuscany. To this grey tower is attached a large modern dwelling—a villa,—painted of a dull yellow colour, with an overlapping roof, the walls pierced full of windows. The tower, villa, and the line of cliffs on which they stand, face east and west; on one side the forest and Corellia crowning a rocky height, on the other side mountains, with a deep abyss at the foot of the cliffs, yawning between. It is the Marchesa's pleasure to inhabit the old tower rather than the pleasant villa, with its big windows and large, cheerful rooms.

Being tall and spare, Silvestro stoops under the low, arched doorway, heavily clamped with iron and nails, leading into the tower; then he mounts

very slowly a winding stair of stone to the second story. The sound of his footsteps brings a whole pack of dogs rushing out upon the gravel.

(On the gravel before the house there is a fountain springing up out of a marble basin full of gold fish. Pots are set round the edge with sweetest-smelling flowers—tuberoses, heliotropes, and gardenias.) The dogs, barking loudly, run round the basin and upset some of the pots. One noble mastiff, with long white hair and strong straight limbs—the leader of the pack—pursues Silvestro up the dark, tiring stairs. When the mastiff has reached him and smelt at him, he stands still, wags his tail, and thrusts his nose into Silvestro's hand.

"Poor Argo!" says the Steward, meekly. "Don't bark at me; I cannot bear it now."

Argo gives a friendly sniff, and leaves him.

At a door on the right, Silvestro stops short, to collect his thoughts and his breath. He has not seen his mistress for a year. His soul sinks at the thought of what he must tell her now. "Can she punish me?" he asks himself, vaguely. Perhaps. He must bear it if she does. He has done all he can. Consoled by this reflection, he knocks. A well-known voice answers, "Come in." Silvestro's

clammy hand is on the lock—a worm-eaten door creaks on its hinges,—he enters.

The Marchesa nods to Silvestro without speaking. She is seated before a high desk of carved walnut wood, facing the door. The desk is covered with papers. A file of papers is in her hand; others lie upon her lap. All round there are cupboards, shelves, and drawers, piled with papers and documents, most of them yellow with age. These consist of old leases, contracts, copies of various lawsuits with her tenants, appeals to Barga, mortgages, accounts. The room is low, and rounded to the shape of the tower. Naked joists and rafters of black wood support the ceiling. The light comes in through some loopholes, high up, cut in the thickness of the wall. Some tall high-backed chairs, covered with strips of faded satin, stand near the chimney. A wooden bedstead, without curtains, is partly concealed behind a painted screen, covered with gods and goddesses, much consumed and discoloured from the damp. As the room had felt a little chilly from want of use, a large fire of unbarked wood had been kindled. The fire blazes fiercely on the flat stones within an open hearth, unguarded by a grate.

Having nodded to Silvestro, the Marchesa takes no further notice of him. From time to time she

flings a loose paper from those lying before her—over her shoulder towards the fire, which is at her back. Of these papers some reach the fire; others, but half consumed, fall back upon the floor. The flames of the wood fire leap out and seize the papers—now one by one,—now as they lie in little heaps. The flames leap up; the burning papers crumple along the floor, in little streaks of fire, catching others that lie, still further on in the room, still unconsumed. Ere these papers have sunk into ashes, a fresh supply, thrown over her shoulder by the Marchesa, have caught the flames. All the space behind her chair is covered with smouldering papers. A stack of wood, placed near to replenish the fire, has caught, and is smouldering also. The fire too, on the hearth is burning fiercely; it crackles up the wide open chimney in a mass of smoke and sparks.

The Marchesa is far too much absorbed to notice this. Silvestro, standing near the door—the high desk and the Marchesa's tall figure between him and the hearth—did not perceive it either. Still the Marchesa bends over her papers, reading some and throwing others over her shoulders into the flames behind.

Silvestro, who had grown hot and cold twenty times in a minute, standing before her, his book

keep the peasants, and pay the taxes? I must live."

"Doubtless, Excellent Madama." Silvestro was infinitely relieved at the calmness with which the Marchesa received his announcement. He could not have believed it. He feels most grateful to her. "But if Madama will speak to Fra Pacifico, he will tell her how bitter the distress must be this Winter. The Town Council"—Silvestro, deceived by her apparent calmness, has made a mistake in naming the Town Council. It is too late. The words have been spoken. Knowing his mistress's temper, Silvestro imperceptibly glides towards the door as he mentions that body—"The Town Council has decreed——" His words die away in his throat at her aspect.

"Santo dei Santi!" she screams, boiling over with rage, "I forbid you to talk to me of the Town Council."

Silvestro's hand is upon the lock to ensure escape.

"Madama,—consider," pleads Silvestro, well-nigh desperate. "The Town Council might appeal to Barga," Silvestro almost whispers now.

"Let them—let them; it is just what I should like. Let them appeal. I will fight them at law, and beat them in full court—The ruffians!" She

gives a short, scornful laugh. "Yes, we will fight it out at Barga."

Suddenly the Marchesa stops. Her eyes have now reached the balance-sheet on the last page. She draws a long breath.

"Why, there is nothing!" she exclaims, fixing her forefinger on the total, then raising her head and fixing her eyes on Silvestro—"Nothing!"

Silvestro shrinks, as it were, into himself. He silently bows his head in terrified acquiescence.

"A thousand francs! How am I to live on a thousand francs?"

Silvestro shakes from head to foot. One hand slides from the lock; he joins it to the other, clasps them both together, and sways himself to and fro as a man in bodily anguish.

At the sight of the balance-sheet a kind of horror has come over the Marchesa. So intense is this feeling she absolutely forgets to abuse Silvestro. All she desires is to get rid of him before she has betrayed her alarm.

"I shall call a Council," she says, collecting herself; "I shall take the chair. I shall find funds to meet these wants. Give the Sindaco and Ser Giacomo notice of this, Silvestro, immediately."

The steward stares at his mistress in mute amaze-

ment, he inclines his head, and turns to go; better ask her no questions and escape.

"Silvestro!"—the Marchesa calls after him imperiously, "Come here." (She is resolved that he, a menial, shall see no change in her.) "At this season the woods are full of game. I will have no poachers, mind. Let notices be posted up at the town-gate and at the church-door—Do you hear? No one shall carry a gun within my woods."

Silvestro's lips form to two single words, and these come very faint: "The poor!" Then he holds himself together, terrified.

"The poor!" retorts the Marchesa, defiantly,—"the poor! For shame, Silvestro! They shall not overrun my woods and break through my vineyards —they shall not! You hear?" Her shrill voice rings round the low room. "No poachers—No trespassers, remember that; I shall tell Adamo the same. Now go, and, as you pass tell Fra Pacifico I want him to-morrow." ("He must help me with Enrica," was her thought.)

When Silvestro was gone a haggard look came over the Marchesa's pale face. One by one she turned over the leaves of the rental lying before her, glanced at them, then laid the book down upon the desk. She leant back in her chair, crossed her arms, and fell into a muse,—the burning papers on

the hearth, and those also smouldering on the floor, lighting up every grain in the wood-work of the cupboards at her back.

This was ruin—absolute ruin! The broad lands that spread well-nigh for forty miles in the mountains and along the river Serchio,—the feudal tower in which she sat, over which still floated, on festivals, the banner of the Guinigi (crosses of gold on a red field—borne at the Crusades); the stately palace at Lucca,—its precious heirlooms—Strangers must have it all!

She had so fortified herself against all signs of outward emotion, other than she chose to show, that even in solitude she was composed; but the veins swelled in her forehead, and she turned very white. Yet there had been a way. "Enrica"—her name escaped the Marchesa's thin lips unwittingly. "Enrica."—The sound of her own voice startled her. (Enrica was now alone, shut up by her aunt's order in her little chamber on the third floor over her own. On their arrival, the Marchesa had sternly dismissed her without a word.)

"Enrica."—With that name rose up within her a thousand conflicting thoughts. She had severed herself from Enrica. But for Cavaliere Trenta she would have driven her from the palace. She had not cared whether Enrica lived or died—indeed,

she had wished her dead. Yet Enrica could save the land,—the palace—make the great name live! Had she but known all this at Lucca! Was it too late? Trenta had urged the marriage with Count Nobili. But Trenta urged every marriage. Could she consent to such a marriage? Own herself ruined —wrong?—Feel Nobili's foot upon her neck?—Impossible! Her obstinacy was so great she could not bring herself to yield, though all that made life dear was slipping from her grasp.

Yes,—yes it was too late.—The thing was done. She must stand to her own words. Tortures would not have wrung it from her,—but in the solitude of that bare room the Marchesa felt she had gone too far. The landmark of her life, her pride, broke down; her stout heart failed,—tears stood in her dark eyes.

At this moment the report of a gun was heard ringing out from the mountains opposite. It echoed along the cliffs and died away into the abyss below. The Marchesa was instantly leaning out of the lowest loophole, and calling in a loud voice, "Adamo, —Adamo—Angelo, where are you?" (Adamo and Pipa his wife, and Angelo their son, were her attendants.)

Adamo, a stout, big-limbed man, bull-necked,—

with large lazy eyes and a black beard as thick as horsehair, a rifle slung by a leather strap across his chest, answered out of the shrubs—now blackening in the twilight: "I am here, Padrona, command me."

"Adamo, who is shooting on my land?"

"Padrona, I do not know."

"Where is Angelo?"

"Here am I," answered a childish voice, and a ragged, loose-limbed lad,—a shock of chestnut hair, out of which the sun had taken all the colour, hanging over his face, from which his merry eyes twinkle—leapt out on the gravel.

"You do not know Adamo? What does this mean? You ought to know. I am but just come back, and there are strangers about already with guns. Is this the way you serve me, Adamo?—and I pay you a crown a month. You idle vagabond!"

"Padrona," spoke Adamo in a deep voice—"I am here alone—this boy helps me but little."

"Alone, Adamo! you dare to say alone, and you have the dogs? Hear how they bark—they have heard the shot too—good dogs, good dogs, they are left me—Alone.—Why, Argo is stronger than three men; Argo knocks over anyone, and he is trained to follow on the scent like a blood-hound. Adamo, you are an idiot!"

Adamo hung his head, either in shame or rage, but he dared not reply.

"Now take the dogs out with you instantly—you hear, Adamo? Argo,—and Ponto the bulldog, and Tuzzi and the others. Take them and go down at once to the bottom of the cliffs. Search among the rocks everywhere. Creep along the vine terraces, and through the olive grounds. Be sure when you go down below the cliffs to search the mouth of the chasm. Go at once. Set the dogs on all you find. —Argo will pin them. He is a brave dog. With Argo you are stronger than any you will meet. If you catch any men, take them at once to the municipality. Wretches, they deserve it!—poaching in my woods!"

"Listen—before you go, tell Pipa to come to me soon."

Pipa's footsteps came clattering up the stairs to the Marchesa's room. The light of the lamp she carried—for it was already dark within the tower—caught the spray of the fountain outside as she passed the narrow slits that served for windows.

"Pipa," said the Marchesa, as she stood before her in the doorway, a broad smile on her merry brown face, "Set that lamp on the desk here, before me. So—that will do. Now go upstairs and

[illegible] the Signorina Emma that I had her Goodnight, and that I will see her to-morrow morning, after breakfast. Then you may go to bed, Pippa. I am busy, and shall sit up late." Pippa curtsied in silence, and closed the baroness's door.

CHAPTER III.

What came of Burning the Marchesa's Papers.

MIDNIGHT had struck from the church clock at Corellia. The strokes seemed to come slower by night than day, and sounded hollower. Hours ago the last lights had gone out. The moon had set behind the cleft summits of La Pagna. Distant thunder had died away among the rocks. The night was close and still. The villa lay in deep shadow, but the outline of the turrets of the tower were clearly marked against the starry sky. All slept, or seemed to sleep.

A thin blue vapour curls out from the Marchesa's casement. This vapour,—at first light as a fog-drift, winds itself upwards, and settles into a cloud, that hovers in the air. Each moment the cloud rises higher and higher. Now it has grown into a lurid canopy, that overhangs the tower. A sudden glow from an arched loop-hole on the second story shows every bar of iron across it. This is caught up below in a broad flash across the basin of the fountain. Within there is a crackling as of dry leaves,—a clinging heavy smell of heated air. An-

other and another flame curls round the narrow loop-hole, twisting upwards on the solid wall.

At this instant there is a low growl, as from a kicked dog. A door below is banged to and locked. Then steps are heard upon the gravel. It is Adamo. He had returned, as the Marchesa bade him, and has come to tell her he has searched everywhere,—down even to the reeds by the river Serchio (where he had discharged his gun at a water-hen), but had found no one, though all the way the dogs had sniffed and whined.

Adamo catches sight of the crimson glare reflected upon the fountain. He looks up at the tower,—he sees the flames. A look of horror comes into his round black eyes. Then, with a twitch, settling his gun firmly upon his shoulder, he rushes to the unlocked door and flings it wide open.

"Pipa! Wife! Angelo!" Adamo shouts down the stone passage connecting the tower with the villa where they slept. "Wake up! The tower is on fire! Fire! Fire!"

As Adamo opened his mouth the rush of hot air, pent up on the winding stair, drawn downwards by the draught from the open door, catches his breath. He staggers against the wall. Then the strong man shook himself together,—again he shouts, "Pipa! Pipa! rise!"

Without waiting for an answer, putting his hand over his mouth, Adamo charges up the stone stairs —up to the Marchesa's door. Her room is on fire.

"I must save her!—I must save her! I will think of Pipa and the children afterwards."

Each step Adamo takes upwards the heat grows fiercer,—the smoke that pours down denser. Twice he had slipped and almost fallen, but he battles bravely with the heat and blinding smoke, and keeps his footing.

Now Adamo is on the landing of the first floor, —Adamo blinded, his head reeling,—but lifting his strong limbs, and firm broad feet, he struggles upwards. He has reached the Marchesa's door. The place is marked by a chink of fire underneath. Adamo passes his hand over the panel; it is unconsumed, the fire drawing the other way out by the window.

"O God! if the door is bolted! I shall drop if I am not quick." Adamo's fingers were on the lock. "The door is bolted—Blessed Virgin, help me!"

He unslings his unloaded gun—he had forgotten it till then—and tightly seizing it in his strong hands, he flings the butt end against the lock. The wood is old, the bolt is loose.

"Holy Jesus! It yields!—It opens!"

Overcome by the rush of fiery air, again Adamo staggers. As he lifts his hands to raise the hair, which, moist from heat, clings to his forehead,—his fingers strike against a medal of the Virgin he wore round his naked throat.

"Mother of God, help me!" A desperate courage seizes him; he rushes in—all before him swims in a red mist. "Help me, Madonna!" comes to his parched lips. "O God, where is the Marchesa?"

A puff of wind from the open door for an instant raised the smoke and sparks; in that instant Adamo sees a dark heap lying on the floor close to the door. It is the Marchesa. "Is she dead or alive?" He cannot stop to tell. He raises her. She lay within his arms. Her dark dress, though not consumed, strikes hot against his chest. Not an instant is to be lost. The fresh rush of air up the stairs has fanned the flames. Every moment they are rising higher. They redden on the dark rafters of the ceiling. The sparks fly about in dazzling clouds. Adamo is on the threshold. Outside it is now so dark that, spite of danger, he has to pause and feel his way downwards, or he might dash his precious burden against the walls. In that pause a piercing cry from above strikes upon

his ear, but in the crackling of the increasing flames and a fresh torrent of smoke and burning sparks that burst out from the room,—Adamo's brain—always of the dullest—is deadened. He forgets that cry. All his thought is to save his mistress. Even Pipa and Angelo and little Gigi are forgotten.

Ere he reaches the level of the first story, the alarm-bell over his head clangs out a goodly peal. A bound of joy within his honest heart gives him fresh courage.

"It is the Madonna! — When I touched her image, I knew that she would help me. Pipa has heard me. Pipa has pulled the bell. She is safe! And Angelo—and little Gigi—safe! safe! Brave Pipa!—How I love her!"

Before a watch could tick twenty seconds, and while Adamo's foot was still on the last round of the winding stair, the church bells of Corellia clash out in answer to the alarm-bell.

Now Adamo has reached the outer door. He stands beneath the stars. His face and hands are black, his hair is singed; his woollen clothes are hot and burn upon him. The cool night air made his skin smart with pain. Already Pipa's arms are round him. Angelo, too, has caught him by the legs, then leaps into the air with a wild hoot. Be-

wildered Pipa cannot speak.—No more can Adamo; but Pipa's clinging arms say more than words. Tenderly Adamo lays the Marchesa down beside the fountain. He totters on a step or two. Feeling suddenly giddy and strangely weak, he stands still. The strain had been too much for the simple soul, who led a quiet life with Pipa and the children. Tears rise in his big black eyes. Greatly ashamed, and wondering what has come to him,—he sinks upon the ground. Pipa, watching him, again flings her arms about him; but Adamo gives her a glance so fierce, as he points to the Marchesa lying helpless upon the ground, it sends her quickly from him. With a smothered sob Pipa turns away to help her.

(Ah! cruel Pipa, and is your heart so full that you have forgotten Enrica, left helpless in the tower?—Yet so it was. Enrica is forgotten. Cruel, cruel Pipa! And stupid Adamo, whose head turns round so fast he must hold on by a tree not to fall again.)

Silvestro and Fra Pacifico now rushed out of the darkness;—Fra Pacifico aroused out of his first sleep. He had not seen the Marchesa since her arrival. He did not know whether Enrica had come with her from Lucca or not. Seeing Pipa busy about the fountain, the women, thought Fra

Pacifico, were safe; so Fra Pacifico strode off on his strong legs to see what could be done to quench the fire, and save, if possible, the more combustible villa. Surely the Villa must be consumed! The smoke now darkened the heavens. The flames belted the thick tower walls as with a burning girdle. Showers of sparks and flames rose out from each aperture with sudden bursts, revealing every detail on the grey old walls—moss and lichen, a trail of ivy that had forced itself upwards,—long grass that floated in the hot air,—a crevice under the battlements where a bird had built its nest.—Then a swirl of smoke swooped down and smothered all, while overhead the mighty company of constellations looked calmly down in their cold brightness!

A crowd of men now came running down from Corellia, roused by the church bells. Pietro, the baker, still hard at work, was the first to hear the bell, to dash into the street, and shout, "Help! help! Fire! fire! At the Villa!"

Oreste and Pilade heard him. They came tumbling out. Ser Giacomo roused the Sindaco—who in his turn woke his clerk; but when Mr. Sindaco was fairly off down the hill, this much-injured and very weary youth turned back and went to bed.

Some bore lighted torches, others copper buckets. Pietro, the butcher, brought the municipal ladder. These men promptly formed a line down the hill, to carry the water from the wilful mountain stream that fed the town fountain. Fra Pacifico took the lead. (He had heard the alarm, and had rung the church bells himself.) No one cared for the Marchesa; but a burning house was a fine sight, and where Fra Pacifico went all Corellia followed. Adamo, recovered now, was soon upon the ladder, receiving the buckets from below. Pipa beside the fountain watched the Marchesa, sprinkling water on her face. "Surely her eyelids faintly quiver?" thinks Pipa.—Pipa watched the Marchesa speechless — watched her as birth and death are only watched!

The Marchesa's eyes had quivered; now they slowly unclose.—Pipa, who, next to the Virgin and the Saints, worshipped her mistress,—laughed wildly,—sobbed,—then laughed again,—kissed her hand, her forehead,—then pressed her in her arms. Supported by Pipa, the Marchesa sat up,—she turned, and then she saw the mountains of smoke bursting from the tower, forming into great clouds that rose over the tree-tops, and shut out the stars. The Marchesa glanced quickly round with her keen, black eyes,—she glanced as one searching for some-

thing she cannot find;—then her lips parted, and one word fell faintly from them:—"Enrica!"

Pipa caught the half-uttered name, she echoed it with a scream.

"Ahi! The Signorina! The Signorina Enrica!"

Pipa shouted to Adamo on the ladder.

"Adamo! Adamo! where is the Signorina?"

Adamo's heart sank at her voice. On the instant he recalled that cry he had heard upon the stairs.

"Where did you see her last?" Adamo shouted back to Pipa out of the din,—his big stupid eyes looking down upon her face. "Upstairs?"

Pipa nodded. She could not speak, it was too horrible.

"Santo Dio! I did not know it!" He struck upon his breast. "Assassin! I have killed her! Assassin! Beast! what have I done?"

Again the air rang with Pipa's shrill cries. The Corellia men, who with eager hands pass the buckets down the hill, stop, and stare and wonder. Fra Pacifico, who had eyes and ears for everyone, turned, and ran forward to where Pipa sat wringing her hands upon the ground, the Marchesa leaning against her.

"Is Enrica in the tower?" asked Fra Pacifico.

"Yes, yes!" the Marchesa answered feebly; "You must save her!"

"Then follow me!" shouted the priest, swinging his strong arms above his head.

Adamo leapt from the ladder. Others,—they were among the very poorest, stepped out and joined him and the priest; but at the very entrance they were met and buffeted by such a gust of fiery wind, such sparks and choking smoke, they all fell back aghast. Fra Pacifico alone stood unmoved, his tall, burly figure dark against the glare.

At this instant a man wrapped in a cloak rushed out of the wood, crossed the red circle reflected from the fire, and dashed into the archway.

"Stop him! stop him!" shouted Adamo from behind.

"You go to certain death!" cried Fra Pacifico, laying his hand upon him.

"I am prepared to die," the other answered, and pushed by him.

Twice he essayed to mount the stairs. Twice he was driven back before them all. See! He has covered his head with his cloak. He has set his foot firmly upon the stone steps—Up, up he mounts —now he is gone! Without there was a breathless silence. "Who is he?—Can he save her?"—Words were not spoken, but every eye asked this question.

The men without are brave, ready to face danger in dark alley—by stream or river—or on the mountain side. Danger is pastime to them, but each one feels in his own heart he is glad not to go. Fra Pacifico stands motionless, a sad stern look upon his swarthy face. For the first time in his life he has not been foremost in danger!

By this time, Fra Pacifico thinks, unless choked, the Stranger must be near the upper story.

The Marchesa has now risen. She stands upright, her eyes riveted on the tower. She knows there is a door that opens from the top of the winding stair, on the highest story, next Enrica's room, a door out on the battlements. Will the Stranger see it? Oh! God, will he see it?—or is the smoke too thick? —or has he fainted ere he reached so high?—or, if he has reached her, is Enrica dead? How heavy the moments pass — weighted with life or death! Look, look! Surely something moves between the turrets of the tower! Yes, something moves. It rises — a muffled form between the turrets — the figure of a man wrapped in a cloak—on the near side out of the smoke and flames. Yes,—It is the Stranger,—Enrica in his arms! All is clearly seen, cut as it were against a crimson background.—A shout rises from every living man — a deep full shout as out of bursting hearts that vent themselves.

Out of the shout the words ring out—"The steps! —The steps!—There—to the right——cut in the battlements! The steps!—the steps!—close by the flagstaff! Pass the steps down to the lower roof of the villa." (The wind set on the other side, drawing the fire that way. The villa was not touched.)

The Stranger heard and bowed his head. He has found the steps;—he has reached the lower roof of the villa;—he is safe!

No one below had moved. The hands by which the water was passed were now laid upon the ladder. It was shifted over to the other side against the villa walls. Adamo and Fra Pacifico stand upon the lower rungs, to steady it. The Stranger throws his cloak below, the better to descend.

"Who is he?" That strong, well-knit frame, those square shoulders,—that curly chestnut hair, the pleasant smile upon his glowing face, proclaim him—It is Count Nobili. He has lands along the Serchio, between Barga and Corellia, and was well known as a keen sportsman.

"Bravo! Bravo! Evviva! Count Nobili! Evviva!" Caps were tossed into the air, hands were wildly clapped, friendly arms are stretched out to bear him up when he descends. Adamo is wildly excited; Adamo wants to mount the ladder to help. The others pull him back. Fra Pacifico stands

ready to receive Enrica, a baffled look on his face. It is the first time Fra Pacifico has stood by and seen another do his work!

See,—Count Nobili is on the ladder—Enrica in his arms! As his feet touch the ground, again the people shout, "Bravo! Count Nobili!" Evviva! Their hot southern blood is roused by the sight of such noble daring. The people press upon him,—they fold him in their arms,—they kiss his hands, his cheeks, even his very feet.

Nobili's eyes flash. He too forgets all else, and, with a glance that thrilled Enrica from head to foot, he kissed her before them all. The men circle round him. They shout louder than before.

As the crowd parted, the dark figure of the Marchesa, standing near the fountain, was disclosed. Before she had time to stir, Count Nobili had led Enrica to her. He knelt upon the ground, and, kissing Enrica's hand, placed it within her own. Then he rose, and, with that grace natural to him, bowed and stood aside, waiting for her to speak.

The Marchesa neither moved nor did she speak. When she felt the warm touch of Enrica's hand within her own, it seemed to rouse her. She drew her towards her and kissed her with more love than she had ever shown before.

"I thank you, Count Nobili," she said, in a

strange cold voice. (Even at that moment she could not bring herself to look him in the face.) "You have saved my niece's life."

"Madame," replied Nobili, his sweet-toned voice trembling, "I have saved my own. Had Enrica perished, I should not have lived."

In these few words the chivalric nature of the man spoke out. The Marchesa waved her hand. She was stately even now.

Nobili understood her gesture, and, stung to the very soul, he drew back.

"Permit me," he said haughtily, before he turned away, "to add my help to those who are labouring to save your house."

The Marchesa bowed her head in acquiescence; then, with unsteady steps, she moved backwards and seated herself upon the ground.

Pipa, meanwhile, had flung her arms about Enrica, with such an energy that she pinned her to the spot. Pipa pressed her hands about Enrica, feeling every limb; Pipa turned Enrica's white face upwards to the blaze; she stroked her long fair hair that fell like a mantle round her.

"Blessed Mother!" she sobbed, drawing her coarse fingers through the matted curls, "Not a hair singed! Oh, the noble Count! Oh, how I love him——"

"No, dear Pipa," Enrica answered softly, "I am not hurt—only frightened. The fire had but just reached the door when he came. He was just in time."

"To think we had forgotten her!" murmured Pipa, still holding her tightly.

"Who remembered me first?" asked Enrica, eagerly.

"The Marchesa, Signorina—the Marchesa. She remembered you. The Marchesa was brought down by Adamo. Your name was the first word she uttered."

Enrica's blue eyes glistened. In an instant she had disengaged herself from Pipa, and was kneeling at the Marchesa's feet.

"Dear aunt, forgive me. Now that I am saved, forgive me! You must forgive me, and forgive him too!"

These last words came faint and low. The Marchesa put her finger on her lip.

"Not now, Enrica—not now. To-morrow we will speak."

Meanwhile Count Nobili, Fra Pacifico, and the Corellia men strove what human strength could do to put the fire out. Even the Sindaco, forgetting the threats about his rent, laboured hard and willingly—only Silvestro did nothing. Silvestro seemed

stunned; he sat upon the ground staring, and crying like a child.

To save the rooms within the tower was impossible. Every plank of wood was burning. The ceilings had fallen in; only the blackened walls and stone stairs remained. The villa was untouched—the wind, setting the other way, and the thick walls of the tower, had saved it.

Now every hand that could be spared was turned to bring beds from the Steward's for the Marchesa and Enrica. They had gone into Pipa's room until the villa was made ready. Pipa told Adamo, and he told the others, that the Marchesa had not seen the burning papers, and the lighted pile of wood, until the flames rose high behind her back. She had rushed forward—and fallen.

When all was over, Count Nobili was carried up the hill back to Corellia, in triumph, on the shoulders of Pietro the baker, and Oreste, the strongest of the brothers. Every soul of the poor townsfolk—women as well as men who had not gone down to help—had risen, and were out. They had put lights into their windows. They crowded the doorways. The market-place was full, and the church porch. The fame of Nobili's courage had already reached them. All bless him as he passed. Bless him louder when Nobili, all aglow with hap-

piness, emptied his pockets of all the coin he has, and promised more to-morrow. At this the women lay hold of him, and dance round him. It was long before he was released. At last Fra Pacifico carried him off, almost by force, to sleep at the Curato.

CHAPTER IV.

What a Priest should be.

FRA PACIFICO was a dark, burly man, with a large weather-beaten face, kind grey eyes under a pair of shaggy eyebrows, a resolute nose, large, full-lipped mouth, and a clean-shaven double chin, that rested comfortably upon his priestly stock. He was no longer young, but he had a frame like iron, and in his time he had possessed a force of arm and muscle enough to fell an ox. His strength and daring were acknowledged by all the mountain folks from Corellia to Barga, hardy fellows, and judges of what a man can do. Moreover, Fra Pacifico was more than six feet high—and who does not respect a man of such inches? In fair fight he had killed his man—a brigand chief—who prowled about the mountains towards Carrara. His band had fled and never returned.

Fra Pacifico had stood with his strong feet planted on the earth, over the edge of a rocky precipice,—by which the high road passed—and seized a furious horse dragging a cart holding six poor souls below. Fra Pacifico had found a

shepherd of Corellia,—one of his flock,—struck down by fever on a rocky peak some twenty miles distant, and he had carried him on his back, and laid him on his bed at home. Everyone had some story to tell of his prowess, coolness, and manly daring. When he walked along the streets, the ragged children,—as black with sun and dirt as unfledged ravens—sidled up to him, and, looking up into his grey eyes, ran between his firm-set legs, plucked him by the cassock, and felt in his pockets for an apple or a cake. Then the children held him tight until he had raised them up and kissed them.

Spite of the labours of the previous night (no one had worked harder) Fra Pacifico had risen with daybreak. His office accustomed him to little sleep. There was no time by day or night that he could call his own. If anyone was stricken with sickness in the night, or suddenly seized for death in those pale hours when the day hovers, half-born, over the slumbering earth,—Fra Pacifico must rise and wake his acolyte, the baker's boy—who going late to bed was hard to rouse. Along with him he must grope up and down slippery steps, and along dark alleys, bearing the Host under a red umbrella, until he had placed it within the dying lips.

If a baby was weakly, or born before its time,

and having given one look at this sorrowful world was about to close its eyes on it for ever,—Fra Pacifico must run out at any moment to christen it.

There was no doctor at Corellia, the people were too poor, so Fra Pacifico was called upon to do a doctor's duty. He must draw the teeth of such as needed it; bind up cuts and sores; set limbs, and give such simple drugs as he knew the nature of. He must draw up papers for those who could not afford to pay the notary; write letters for those who could only make a cross; hear and conceal every secret that reached him in the confessional or on the death-bed. He must be at hand at any hour in the twenty-four,—ready to counsel, soothe, command, and reprimand; to bless, to curse, and, if need be, to strike,—when his righteous anger rose; to fetch and carry for all, and, poor himself, to give out of his scanty store. These were his priestly duties.

Fra Pacifico lived at the back of the old Lombard church of Santa Barbara, in a house overlooking a damp square, overgrown with moss and weeds. Between the tower where the bells hung, and the body of the church, an open loggia (balcony), roofed with wood and tiles, rested on slender pillars. In the loggia, Fra Pacifico, when at leisure, would sit and rest and read his breviary;

sometimes smoke a solitary pipe—stretching out his shapely legs in the luxury of doing nothing. Behind the loggia were the priest's four rooms, bare even for the bareness of that squalid place. He kept no servant, but it was counted an honour to serve him, and the mothers of Corellia came by turns to cook and wash for him.

Fra Pacifico, as I have said, had risen at daybreak. Now he is searching to find a messenger to send to Lucca, as the Marchesa had desired, to summon Cavaliere Trenta. That done, he takes a key out of his pocket and unlocks the church-door. Here, kneeling at the altar, he celebrates a private mass of thanksgiving for the Marchesa and Enrica. Then, with long strides, he descends the hill to see what is doing at the villa.

CHAPTER V.

"Say not too much."

THE sun was streaming on mountain and forest before Count Nobili woke from a deep sleep. As he cast his drowsy eyes around upon the homely little room, the coarsely-painted frescoes on the walls,—the gaudy cups and plates arranged in a cupboard opposite the bed,—and on a wax Gesù Bambino, placed in state upon the mantelpiece, surrounded by a flock of blue sheep, browsing on purple grass, he could not at first remember where he was. The noises from the square below,—the clink of the donkeys' hoofs upon the pavement as they struggled up the steep alley laden with charcoal;—the screams of children,—the clamour of women's voices moving to and fro with their wooden shoes—and the bombs of the church bells—sounding overhead for morning mass,—came to him as in a dream.

As he raised his hand to push back the hair which fell over his eyes, a sharp twitch of pain—for his hands were scorched and blistered—brought all that had happened vividly before him. A warmth

of joy and love glowed at his heart. He had saved Enrica's life. Henceforth that life was his. From that day they would never part. From that day, forgetting all others, he would live for her alone.

He must see her instantly. If possible, before his enemy, her aunt, had risen—see Enrica, and speak to her, alone. Oh! the luxury of that! How he longed to feast his eyes upon the softness of her beauty! To fill his ears with the music of her voice! To touch her little hand, and scent the fragrance of her breath upon his cheek! There was no thought within Nobili but love and loyalty. At that moment Enrica was the only woman in the world whom he loved, or ever could love!

He dressed himself in haste, opened the door, and stepped out into the loggia. Not finding Fra Pacifico there, or in the other rooms, he passed down the stone steps into the little square, threading his way beyond as he best could, through the tortuous little alleys towards the gate. Most of the men had already gone to work; but such as lingered, or whose business kept them at home, rose as he passed, and bared their heads to him. The mothers and the girls stared at him and smiled; troops of children followed at his heels through the town, until he reached the gate.

Without the holiness of Nature was around.

The morning air blew upon him crisp and clear. The sky, blue as a turquoise, was unbroken by a cloud. The trees were bathed in gold. The chain of Apennines rose up before him in lines of dreamy loveliness, like another world, midway towards heaven. A passing shower veiled the massive summits towards Massa and Carrara, but the broad valley of the Serchio, mapped out in smallest details, lay serenely luminous below. Beyond the gate there was no certain road. It broke into little tracts and rocky paths terracing downwards. Following these, streams ran bubbling, sparkling like gems as they dashed against the stones. No shadows rested upon the grass, cooled by the dew and carpeted by flowers. The woods danced in the October sunshine. Painted butterflies and gnats circled in the warm air; green lizards gambolled among the rocks that cut the turf. Flocks of Autumn birds swooped round in rapid flight. Some freshly shorn sheep, led by a ragged child, cropped the short herbage fragrant with strong herbs. A bristly pig carrying a bell about his neck, ran wildly up and down the grassy slope in search of chestnuts.

Through this sylvan wilderness Nobili came stepping downwards by the little paths, like a young God full of strength and love!

The villa lay beneath him; the blackened ruins of the tower rose over the chestnut tops. These blackened ruins showed him which way to go. As he set his foot upon the topmost terrace of the garden his heart beat fast.

Enrica would be there—he knew it. Enrica would be waiting for him.—Could Nobili yearn so fondly for Enrica and she not know it?—Could the mystic bond that knit them together, from the first moment they had met, leave her unconscious of his presence? No; that subtle charm that draws lovers together, and breathes from heart to heart the sacred fire,—had warned her. She was standing there—there beneath him under the shadow of a flowery thicket. Enrica was leaning against the trunk of a magnolia tree, the shining leaves framing her in a rich canopy, through which a glint of sunshine pierced, falling upon her light hair and the white dress she wore.

Nobili paused to look at her. Miser-like he would pause to gloat upon his treasure! How well a golden glory would become that sunny head! She only wanted wings, he thought, to make an angel of her. Enrica's face was bent. Her thoughts, far away, were lost in a delicious world, neither earth nor heaven,—a world with Nobili! What mysteries were there, what unknown joys, or sharper

pains perchance,—she neither knew nor cared. She would share all with him! In a moment the place she stood on was darkened. Something stood between her and the sun. She looked up and gave a little cry, then stood motionless,—the colour going and coming upon her cheek. One bound and Nobili was beside her. He strained her to him with a passion that robbed him of all words. Scarcely knowing what he did, he grasped the tangled meshes of her silken hair and covered them with kisses. Then he raised her soft face in his hand, and gazed upon it long and fervently.

Enrica's plaintive eyes melted as they met his. She quivered in his embrace. Her whole soul went out to him as she lay within his arms. He bent his head—their trembling lips clung together in one long kiss. Then the little golden head drooped upon his breast, and nestled there, as if at last at home. Never before had Enrica's dainty form yielded beneath his touch. Before, he had but clasped her little hand, or pressed her dress—or stolen a hasty kiss on those truant locks of hers. Now Enrica was his own, his very own. The blood shot up like fire over his face. His eyes devoured her. As she lay encircled in his arms, a burning blush crimsoned her cheeks. She turned away her face, and feebly tried to loosen herself from him.

Nobili only pressed her closer. He would not let her go.

"Do not turn from me, Enrica," he softly murmured. "Would you rob me of the rapture of my first embrace?"

There was a passionate tremor in his voice that revibrated within her from head to foot. Her flushed cheek grew pale as she listened.

"Heavens! how I have longed for you! How I have longed for you sitting at home! And you so near!"

"And I have longed for you," whispered Enrica, blushing again redder than Summer roses.—Enrica was too simple to dissemble.—"Oh! Nobili," and she raised her dreamy eyes upwards to his, then dropped them again before the fire of his glance, "You cannot tell how lonely I have been. Oh! I have suffered so much, I thought I should have died."

"My own Enrica, that is gone and past. Now we shall never part. I have won you for my wife. Even the Marchesa must own this. Last night the old life died out as the smoke from that old tower. To-day you have waked to a new life with me."

Again Nobili's arms stole round her; again he sealed the sacrament of love with a fervid kiss.

Enrica trembled from head to foot—a scared look came over her. The rush of passionate joy coming upon the terrors of the past night, was more than she could bear. Nobili watched the change.

"Forgive me, love," he said, "I will be calmer. Lay your dear head against me. We will sit together here, under the trees."

"Yes," said Enrica in a faltering voice. "I have so much to say." Then, suddenly recalling the blessing of his presence, a smile stole about her bloodless lips. She gave a happy sigh. "Yes, Nobili,—we can talk now without fear. But I can talk only of you. I have no thought but you. I never dreamed of such happiness as this! Oh, Nobili!" And she hid her face in the strong arm entwined about her.

"Speak to me, Enrica; I will listen to you for ever."

Enrica clasped his hand, looked at it, sighed, pressed it between each of hers, sighed again, then raised it to her lips.

"Dear hand," she said, "how it is burnt! But for this hand, I should be nothing now but a little heap of ashes in the tower.—Nobili"—her tone suddenly changed—"Nobili, I will try to love life now that you have given it to me." Her voice

rang out like music, and her tell-tale eyes caught his, with a glance as passionate as his own. "Count Montalto," she said absently, as giving utterance to a passing thought,—"Count Montalto told me, only a week ago, that I was born to be unhappy. He said he read it in my eyes. I believed him then—Not now—Not now."

Why, she could not have explained, but, as the Count's name passed her lips, Enrica was sorry she had mentioned it.

Nobili noted this. He gave an imperceptible start, and drew back a little from her.

"Do you know Count Montalto?" Enrica asked him timidly.

"I know him by sight," was Nobili's reply. "He is a mad fellow—a Republican. Why does he come to Lucca?"

Enrica shook her head.

"I do not know," she answered, still confused.

"Where did you meet him, Enrica?"

She blushed, and dropped her eyes. As she gave him no answer, he asked another question, gazing down upon her earnestly,

"How did Count Montalto come to know what your eyes said?"

As Nobili spoke his voice sounded changed. He waited for an answer with a look as if he had

been wronged. Enrica's answer did not come immediately. She felt frightened.

"Oh! why," she thought, "had she mentioned Montalto's name?" Nobili was angry with her—she was sure he was angry with her.

"I met him at my aunt's one evening," she said at last, gathering courage as she stole her little hand into one of his, and knit her fingers tightly within his own. "We went up into the Guinigi Tower together. There were dear old Trenta and Baldassare Lena with us."

"Indeed!" replied Nobili coldly. "I did not know that the Marchesa Guinigi ever received young men."

As Nobili said this he fixed his eyes upon Enrica's face. What could he read there but assurance of the perfect innocence within? Yet the name of Count Montalto had grated upon his ear like a discord clashing among sweet sounds. He shook the feeling off, however, for the time. Again he was her gracious lover.

"Tell me, love," he said, drawing Enrica to him, "did you hear my signal last night?—the shot I fired below, out of the woods?"

"Yes, I heard a shot. Something told me it must be you. I thought I should have died when

I heard my aunt order Adamo to unloose those dreadful dogs. How did you escape them?"

"The cunning beasts! They were upon my track. How I did in the darkness I cannot tell, but I managed to scramble down the cliff and to reach the opposite mountain. The chasm was then between us. So the dogs lost the scent upon the rocks, and missed me. I left Lucca almost as soon as you. Trenta told me that the Marchesa had brought you here because you would not give me up. Dear heart, how I grieved that I had brought suffering on you!"

He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips, then continued—

"As long as it was day I prowled about under the cliffs in the shadow of the chasm. I watched the stars come out. There was one star that shone brightly above the tower; to me that star was you, Enrica. I could have knelt to it."

"Dear Nobili!" murmured Enrica, softly.

"As I waited there I saw a great red vapour gather over the battlements. The alarm bell sounded. I climbed up through the wood, where the rocks are lower, and watched among the shrubs. I saw the Marchesa carried out in Adamo's arms. I heard your name, dear love, passed from mouth to mouth.

I looked round—You were not there. I understood it all; I rushed to save you."

Again Nobili wound his arms round Enrica and drew her to him with passionate ardour. The thought of Count Montalto had faded out like a bad dream at daylight.

Enrica's blue eyes dimmed with tears.

"Oh! do not weep, Enrica!" he cried. "Let the past go, love. Did the Marchesa think that bolts and bars, and Adamo, and watch-dogs, would keep Nobili from you?" He gave a merry laugh. "I shall not leave Corellia until we are affianced. Fra Pacifico knows it—I told him so last night. Cavaliere Trenta is expected to-day from Lucca. Both will speak to your aunt. One may have done so already, for what I know, for Fra Pacifico had left his house before I rose. He must be here. Is this a time to weep, Enrica?" he asked her tenderly. How comely Nobili looked! What life and joy sparkled in his bright eyes!

"I am very foolish—I hope you will forgive me," was Enrica's answer, spoken a little sadly. Her confidence in herself was shaken, since Count Montalto's name had jarred between them. "Let us walk a little in the shade."

"Yes. Lean on me, dearest; the morning is

delicious. But remember, Enrica, I will have smiles —nothing but smiles."

As Nobili bore her up on his strong arm, pacing up and down among the flowering trees that bowing in the light breeze, shed gaudy petals at their feet,— Nobili looked so strong, and resolute, and bold— his eyes had such a power in them as he gazed down proudly upon her—that the tears which trembled upon Enrica's eyelids disappeared. Nobili's strength came to her as her own strength. She, who had been so crushed and wounded, brought so near to death,—needed this to raise her up to life. And now it came—came as she gazed at him.

Yes,—she would live—live a new life with him. And Nobili had done it—done it unconsciously, as the sun unfolds the bosom of the rose, and from the delicate bud creates the perfect flower.

Something Nobili understood of what was passing within her, but not all. He had yet to learn the treasures of faith and love shut up in the bosom of that silent girl,—to learn how much she loved him—only *him*. (A new lesson for one who had trifled with so many, and given and taken such facile oaths!)

Neither spoke, but wandered up and down in vague delight.

Why was it that at this moment Nobili's thoughts

strayed to Lucca, and to Nera Boccarini?—Nera rose before him, glowing and velvet-eyed, as on that night she had so tempted him. He drove her image from him. Nera was dead to him. Dead? —Fool!—And did he think that anything can die? Do not our very thoughts rise up and haunt us in some subtle consequence of after-life? Nothing dies—nothing is isolated. Each act of daily intercourse—the merest trifle, as the gravest issue,—makes up the chain of life. Link by link that chain draws on, weighted with good or ill, and clings about us to the very grave.

Thinking of Nera, Nobili's colour changed,—a dark look clouded his ready smile. Enrica asked, "What pains you?"

"Nothing, love, nothing," Nobili answered vaguely, "only I fear I am not worthy of you."

Enrica raised her eyes to his. Such a depth of tenderness and purity beamed from them, Nobili asked himself with shame, "How he could have forgotten her?" With this blue-eyed angel by his side it seemed impossible, and yet——

Pressing Enrica's hand more tightly, he placed it fondly on his own. "So small, so true," he murmured, gazing at it as it lay on his broad palm.

"Yes, Nobili, true to death," she answered with a sigh.

Still holding her hand, "Enrica," he said solemnly, "I swear to love you and no other, while I live. God is my witness."

As he lifted up his head in the earnestness with which he spoke, the sunshine streaming downwards shone full upon his face.

Enrica trembled. "Oh! do not say too much," she cried, gazing up at him entranced.

With that sun-ray upon his face, Nobili seemed to her, at that moment, more than mortal!

"Angel!" exclaimed Count Nobili, wrought up to sudden passion. "Can you doubt me?"

Before Enrica could reply, a snake, warmed by the hot sun, curled upwards from the terraced wall behind them, where it had basked, and glided swiftly between them. Nobili's heel was on it; in an instant he had crushed its head. But there between them lay the quivering reptile, its speckled scales catching the light. Enrica shrieked and started back.

"O God! what an evil omen!" she said no more, only her shifting colour and uneasy eyes told what she felt.

"An evil omen, love!" and Nobili brushed away the snake with his foot into the underwood and laughed. "Not so. It is an omen that I shall

crush all who would part us. That is how I read it."

Enrica shook her head. That snake crawling between them was the first warning to her that she was still on earth. Till then it had seemed to her that Nobili's presence must be like Paradise. Now for a moment a terrible doubt crept over her. Could happiness be sad? It must be so, for now she could not tell whether she was sad or happy.

"Oh! do not say too much, dear Nobili." She repeated almost to herself, "Or——" Her voice dropped. She looked towards the spot where the snake had fallen, and shuddered.

Nobili did not then reply, but, taking Enrica by the hand, he led her up a flight of steps to a higher terrace, where a cypress avenue threw long shadows across the marble pavement.

"You are mine," he whispered, "mine—As by a miracle!"

There was such rapture in his voice that heaven came down into her heart, and every doubt was stilled.

At this moment Fra Pacifico's towering figure appeared ascending a lower flight of steps towards them, coming from the house. He trod with that firm, grand step churchmen have in common with actors—only the stage upon which each treads is

different. Behind Fra Pacifico was the short, plump figure and the white hat of Cavaliere Trenta (a dwarf beside the priest), his rosy face rosier than ever from the rapid drive from Lucca. Trenta's kind eyes twinkled under his white eyebrows as he spied Enrica above, standing side by side with Nobili. How different the dear child looked from that last time he had seen her at Lucca!

Enrica flew down the steps to meet him. She threw her arms round his neck. Count Nobili followed her; he shook hands with the Cavaliere and Fra Pacifico.

"His Reverence and I thought we should find you two together," said Cavaliere Trenta, with a chuckle. "Count Nobili, I wish you joy."

His voice faltered a little, and a spotless handkerchief was drawn out and called into service. Nobili reddened, then bowed with formal courtesy.

"It is all come right, I see."—Trenta gave a sly glance from one to the other, though the tears were in his eyes.—"I shall live to open the marriage ball on the first floor of the Palace yet. Bagatella! I would have tried to give the dear child to you myself, had I known how much she loved you,—but you have taken her. Well, well,—possession is better than gift."

"She gave herself to me, Cavaliere. Last night's work only made the gift public," was Nobili's reply.

There was a tone of triumph in Nobili's voice as he said this. He stooped and passed his lips to Enrica's hand. Enrica stood by with downcast eyes, —a spray of pink oleander swaying from the terrace wall in the light breeze above her head,—for background.

The old Cavaliere nodded his head, round which the little curls set faultlessly under his white hat.

"My dear Count Nobili, permit me to offer my advice. You must settle this matter at once—at once, I say;" and Trenta struck his stick upon the marble balustrade for greater emphasis.

"I quite agree with you," put in Fra Pacifico in his deep voice. "The impression made by your courage last night must not be lost by delay. I never saw an act of greater daring. Had you not come I should have tried to save Enrica, but I am past my prime; I should have failed."

"You cannot count on the Marchesa's gratitude," continued Trenta—"an excellent lady, and my oldest friend, but proud and capricious. You must take her like the wind when it blows—Ha! ha! like the wind. I am come here to help you both."

"Cavaliere," said Nobili, turning towards him (his vagrant eyes had wandered off to Enrica, so charming, with the pink oleander and its dark green leaves waving above her blond head), "Do me the favour to ask the Marchesa Guinigi at what hour she will admit me to sign the marriage contract. I have pressing business that calls me back to Lucca to-day."

"So soon, dear Nobili!" a soft voice whispered at his ear—"so soon!"—And then there was a sigh. Surely her Paradise was very brief! Enrica had thought in her simplicity that, once met, they two never should part again, but spend the live-long days together side by side among the woods, lingering by flowing streams; or in the rich shade of purple vine bowers; or in mossy caves, shaded by tall ferns, hid on the mountain side, and let Time and the World roll by. This was the life she dreamed of. Could any grief be there?

"Yes, love," Nobili answered to her question. "I must return to Lucca to-night. I started on the instant, as the Cavaliere knows. Before I go, however, all must be settled about our marriage, and the contract signed. I will take no denial."

Nobili spoke with the determination that was in him. Enrica's heart gave a bound. "The contract!" She had never thought of that. "The con-

tract and the marriage!"—"Both close at hand!—Then the life she dreamed of must come true in very earnest!"

The Cavaliere looked doubtingly at Fra Pacifico. Fra Pacifico shrugged his big shoulders, looked back again at Cavaliere Trenta, and smiled rather grimly. There was always a sense of suppressed power, moral and physical, about Fra Pacifico. In conversation he had a way of leaving the burden of small talk to others, and of reserving himself for special occasions; but when he spoke he must be listened to.

"Quick work, my dear Count," was all the priest said to Nobili in answer. "Do you think you can insure the Marchesa's consent?" Now he addressed the Cavaliere.

"Oh, my friend will be reasonable no doubt. After last night, she must consent." The Cavaliere was always ready to put the best construction upon everything. "If she raises any obstacles, I think I shall be able to remove them."

"Consent!" cried Nobili fiercely echoing back the word—"She must consent—She will be mad to refuse."

"Well—well—we shall see.—You, Count Nobili, have done all to make it sure. The terms of the

contract (I have heard of them from Fra Pacifico) are princely."

A look from Count Nobili stopped Trenta from saying more.

"Now, Enrica," and the Cavaliere turned and took her arm, "come in and give me some breakfast. An old man of eighty must eat, if he means to dance at weddings."

"You, Nobili, must come with me," said Fra Pacifico, laying his hand on the Count's shoulder. "We will wait the Cavaliere's summons to return here over a bottle of the Marchesa's best vintage, and a cutlet cooked by Maria. She is my best cook; I have one for every day in the week."

So they parted—Trenta with Enrica descending flight after flight of steps, leading from terrace to terrace, down to the villa; Nobili mounting upwards to the forest with Fra Pacifico towards Corellia,—to await the Marchesa's answer

CHAPTER VI.

The Contract.

FRA PACIFICO, with Adamo and Pipa, had laboured ever since daybreak to arrange the rooms at the villa before the Marchesa rose. Pipa had freely used the broom and many pails of water. All the windows were thrown open, and clouds of invisible incense from the flowers without sweetened the fusty rooms.

The villa had not been inhabited for nearly fifty years. It was scantily provided with furniture, but there were chairs and tables and beds, and all the rough necessaries of life. To make all straight, whole generations of beetles had been swept away; and patriarchal spiders, which clung tenaciously to the damp spots on the walls. A scorpion or two had been found, which, firmly resisting to quit the chinks where they had grown and multiplied, had died by decapitation. Fra Pacifico would not have owned it, but he had discovered and killed a nest of black adders that lay concealed, curled up in a curtain.

He had with his own hands, in the early morn-

ing, carefully fashioned the spacious Sala on the ground-floor to the Marchesa's liking. A huge sofa, with a faded amber cover, had been drawn out of a recess, and so placed that the light should fall at her back.—She objected to the sunshine, with true Italian perverseness. Some armchairs, once gilt, and still bearing a coronet, were placed in a semi-circle opposite. The windows of the Sala, and two glass doors of the same size and make, looked east and west; towards the terraces and the garden on one side, and over the cliffs and the chasm to the opposite mountains on the other. The walls were broken by doors of varnished pine-wood. These doors led, on the right, to the chapel, Enrica's bed-room, and many empty apartments. On the left, to the Marchesa's suite of rooms, the offices, and the stone corridor which communicated with the now ruined tower. High up on the walls of the Sala, two large and roughly-painted frescoes decorated the empty spaces. A Dutch seaport on one side, with sloping roofs and tall gables, bordering a broad river, upon which ships sailed vaguely away into a yellow haze. (Not more vaguely sailing, perhaps, than many human ships, with life-sails set to catch the wind of fortune, ships which never make more way than these painted emblems!) Opposite, a hunting party of the olden time picnicked in a

forest glade; a brown and red palace in the background, in front lords and ladies lounging on the grass—bundles of satin, velvet, powder, ribbons, feathers, shoulder-knots, ruffles, long-tailed coats, and trains.

A door to the left opened. There was a sound of voices talking.

"My honoured Marchesa," the Cavaliere was heard to say in his most dulcet tones, "in the state of your affairs, you cannot refuse. Why then delay? The day is passing by; Count Nobili is impatient. Let me implore you to lose no more time."

While he was speaking the Marchesa entered the Sala, passing close under the fresco of the vaguely sailing ships upon the wall.—Can the Marchesa tell whither she is drifting more than these? —She glanced round approvingly, then seated herself upon the sofa. Trenta obsequiously placed a foot-stool at her feet, a cushion at her back. Even the tempered light, which had been carefully prepared for her by closing the outer wooden shutters, could not conceal how sallow and worn she looked, nor the black circles that had gathered round her eyes. Her dark dress hung about her as if she had suddenly grown thin; her white hands fell listlessly at her side. The Marchesa knew that she must consent to Count Nobili's conditions. She knew

she must consent this very day. But such a struggle as this knowledge cost her, coming so close upon the agitation of the previous night, was more than even her iron nerves could bear. As she leant back upon the sofa, shading her eyes with her hand, as was her habit, she felt she could not frame the words with which to answer the Cavaliere, were it to save her life.

As for the Cavaliere, who had seated himself opposite, his plump little person was so engulphed in an armchair, nothing but his snowy head was visible. This he waved up and down reflectively, rattled his stick upon the floor, and glanced indignantly from time to time at the Marchesa. Why would she not answer him?

Meanwhile a little colour had risen upon her cheeks. She forced herself to sit erect, arranged the folds of her dark dress, then, in a kind of stately silence, seemed to lend herself to listen to what Trenta might have to urge, as though it concerned her as little as that rose-leaf which comes floating in from the open door and drops at her feet.

"Well, Marchesa, well,—what is your answer?" asked Trenta, much nettled at her assumed indifference. "Remember that Count Nobili and Fra Pacifico have been waiting for some hours."

"Let Nobili wait," answered the Marchesa, a sudden glare darting into her dark eyes—"He is born to wait for such as I."

"Still"—Trenta was both tired and angry, but he dared not show it; only he rattled his stick louder on the floor, and from time to time aimed a savage blow with it against the carved legs of a neighbouring table—"Still,—why do the thing ungraciously? The Count's offers are magnificent. Surely in the face of absolute ruin.—Fra Pacifico assures me——"

"Let Fra Pacifico mind his own business," was the Marchesa's answer.

"Nobili saved Enrica's life last night; that cannot be denied."

"Yes—last night, last night; and I am to be forced and fettered because I set myself on fire! I wish I had perished, and Enrica too!"

A gesture of horror from the Cavaliere recalled the Marchesa to a sense of what she had uttered.

"And do you deem it nothing, Cesare Trenta, after a life spent in building up the ancient name I bear, that I should be brought to sign a marriage contract with a pedlar's son?" She trembled with passion.

"Yet it must be done," answered Trenta.

"Must be done! Must be done! I would rather

die! Mark my words, Cesare. No good will come of this marriage. That young man is weak and dissolute. He is mad with wealth, and the vulgar influence that comes with wealth. As a man, he is unworthy of my niece, who, I must confess, has the temper of an angel."

"I believe that you are wrong, Marchesa; Count Nobili is much beloved in Lucca. Fra Pacifico has known him from a boy. He praises him greatly. I also like him."

"Like him!—Yes, Cesare, you are such an easy fool; you like everyone. First Montalto, then Nobili. Montalto was a gentleman, but this fellow——" She left the sentence incomplete. "Remember my words—you are deceived in him."

"At all events," retorted the Cavaliere, "it is too late to discuss these matters now. Time presses. Enrica loves him. He insists on marrying her. You have no money, and cannot give her a portion.—My respected Marchesa, I have often ventured to represent to you what those law-suits would entail! —Per Bacco! There must be an end of all things —may I call them in?"

The poor old Chamberlain was completely exhausted. He had spent four hours in reasoning with his friend. The Marchesa turned her head away and shuddered; she could not bring herself to

speak the word of bidding. The Cavaliere accepted this silence for consent. He struggled out of the ponderous armchair, and went out into the garden. There, leaning over the balustrade of the lowest terrace, under the wilful branches of a bignonia-tree, weighted with fronds of scarlet trumpet-flowers, that hung out lazily from the wall, to which the stem was nailed,—Cavaliere Trenta found Count Nobili and Fra Pacifico awaiting the Marchesa's summons. Behind them, at a respectful distance, stood Ser Giacomo the notary from Corellia.—Streamlets pure as crystal ran bubbling down beside them in marble runnels; statues of gods and goddesses balanced each other, on pedestals, at the angles where the steps turned. In front, on the gravel, a pair of peacocks strutted, spreading their gaudy tails in the sunshine.

As the four men entered the Sala, they seemed to bring the evening shadows with them. These suddenly slanted across the floor like pointed arrows, darkening the places where the sun had shone. Was it fancy, or did the sparkling fountain at the door, as it fell backwards into the marble basin, murmur with a sound like human sighs?

Count Nobili walked first. He was grave and pale. Having made a formal obeisance to the Marchesa, his quick eye travelled round in search of

Enrica. Not finding her, it settled again upon her aunt. As Nobili entered, she raised her smooth, snake-like head, and met his gaze in silence. She had scarcely bowed, in recognition of his salute. Now, with the slightest possible inclination of her head, she signed to him to take his place on one of the chairs before her.

Fra Pacifico, his full broad face perfectly unmoved, and Cavaliere Trenta, who watched the scene nervously with troubled, twinkling eyes,—placed themselves on either side of Count Nobili. Ser Giacomo had already slipped round behind the sofa, and seated himself at a table placed against the wall, the marriage contract spread out before him.

There was an awkward pause. Then Count Nobili rose, and, in that sweet-toned voice which had fallen like a charm on many a woman's ear, addressed the Marchesa.

"Marchesa Guinigi, hereditary Governess of Lucca, and Countess of the Garfagnana, I am come to ask in marriage the hand of your niece Enrica Guinigi. I desire no portion with her. The lady herself is a portion more than enough for me."

As Nobili ceased speaking, the ruddy colour shot across his brow and cheeks, and his eyes glistened. His generous nature spoke in those few words.

"Count Nobili," replied the Marchesa, carefully avoiding his eye, which eagerly sought hers.—"Am I correct in addressing you as Count Nobili?—Pardon me if I am wrong." Here she paused, and affected to hesitate. "Do you bear any other name?—I am really quite ignorant of the new titles."

This question was asked with outward courtesy, but there was such a twang of scorn in the Marchesa's tone, such an expression of contempt upon her lip, that the old Chamberlain trembled on his chair. Even at this last moment it was possible her infernal pride might scatter everything to the winds.

"Call me Mario Nobili—that will do," answered the Count, reddening to the roots of his chestnut curls.

The Marchesa inclined her head, and smiled a sarcastic smile, as if rejoicing to acquaint herself with a fact before unknown. Then she resumed:

"Mario Nobili,—You saved my niece's life last night. I am advised that I cannot refuse you her hand in marriage, although——"

Such a black frown clouded Nobili's countenance under the sting of her covert insults that Trenta hastily interposed.

"Permit me to remind you, Marchesa Guinigi, that, subject to your approval, the conditions of the

marriage have been already arranged by me and Fra Pacifico, before you consented to meet Count Nobili. The present interview is purely formal. We are met in order to sign the marriage contract. The notary, I see, is ready. The contract lies before him. May I be permitted to call in the lady?"

"One moment, Cavaliere Trenta," interposed Nobili, who was still standing, holding up his hand to stop him—"One moment. I must request permission to repeat myself the terms of the contract to the Marchesa Guinigi before I presume to receive the honour of her assent."

It was now the Marchesa's turn to be discomfited. This was the avowal of an open bargain between Count Nobili and herself. A common exchange of value for value; such as low creatures barter for with each other in the Exchange. She felt this, and hated Nobili more keenly for having had the wit to wound her.

"I bind myself, immediately on the signing of the contract, to discharge every mortgage, debt, and incumbrance on these feudal lands of Corellia in the Garfagnana. Also any debts in and about the Guinigi palace and lands, within and without the walls of Lucca. I take upon myself every incumbrance," Nobili repeated emphatically, raising his

voice. "My purpose is fully noted in that contract, hastily drawn up at my desire. I also bestow on the Marchesa's niece the Guinigi palace I bought at Lucca—to the Marchesa's niece Enrica Guinigi and her heirs for ever; also a dowry of fifty thousand francs a year, should she survive me."

What is it about gold that invests its possessor with such instant Power? Is Knowledge Power?—or does Gold weigh more than Brains? I think so. Gold pieces and Genius weighed in scales would send poor Genius kicking!

From the moment Count Nobili had made apparent the wealth which he possessed, he was master of the situation. The Marchesa's quick perception told her so. While he was accepting all her debts, with the superb indifference of a *millionnaire*, she grew cold all over.

"Tell the notary," she said, endeavouring to maintain her usual haughty manner, "to put down that, at my death, I bequeath to my niece all of which I die possessed—the palace at Lucca, and the heirlooms, plate, jewels, armour, and the picture of my great ancestor Castruccio Castracani, to be kept hanging in the place where it now is, opposite the seigneurial Throne in the Presence-chamber."

Here she paused. The hasty scratch of Ser Giacomo's pen was heard upon the parchment. Spite

of her efforts to control her feelings, an ashy pallor spread over the Marchesa's face. She grasped her two hands together so tightly that the finger-tips grew crimson; a nervous quiver shook her from head to foot. Cavaliere Trenta, who read the Marchesa like a book, watched her in perfect agony. What was going to happen? Would she faint?

"I also bequeath," continued the Marchesa, rising from her seat with solemn action, and speaking in a low, hushed voice, her eyes fixed on the floor, "I also bequeath the great Guinigi name and our ancestral honours to my niece,—to bear them after my death, together with her husband, then to pass to her eldest child. And may that great name be honoured!"

The Marchesa re-seated herself, raised her thin white hands, and threw up her eyes to heaven. The sacrifice was made!

"May I call in the lady?" again asked the Cavaliere, addressing no one in particular.

"I will fetch her in," replied Fra Pacifico, rising from his chair. "She is my spiritual daughter."

No one moved while Fra Pacifico was absent. Ser Giacomo, the notary, dressed in his Sunday suit of black, remained, pen in hand, staring at the wall. Never in his humble life had he formed one of such

a distinguished company. All his life Ser Giacomo had heard of the Marchesa Guinigi as a most awful lady. If Fra Pacifico had not caught him within his little office near the café, rather than have faced her, Ser Giacomo would have run away.

The door opened, and Enrica stood upon the threshold. There was an air of innocent triumph about her. She had bound a blue ribbon in her golden curls, and placed a rose in the band that encircled her slight waist. Enrica was, in truth, but a common mortal, but she looked so fresh, and bright, and young, with such tender, trusting eyes, —there was such an aureole of purity about her, she might have passed for a Virgin Saint.

As he caught sight of Enrica the moody expression on Count Nobili's face changed, and broke into a smile. In her presence he forgot the Marchesa. Was not such a prize worthy of any battle? What did it signify to him if Enrica were called Guinigi? And as to those tumble-down palaces and heirlooms—what of them? He could buy scores of old palaces any day if he chose. Quickly he stepped forward to meet her as she entered. Fra Pacifico rose, and with great solemnity signed them both with a thrice repeated cross, then he placed Enrica's hand in Nobili's. The Count raised it to his lips, and kissed it fervently.

"My Enrica," he whispered, "this is a glorious day!"

"Oh! it is heavenly!" she answered back, softly.

The Marchesa's white face darkened as she looked at Enrica. How dared Enrica be so happy? But she repressed the reproaches that rose to her lips, though her heart swelled to bursting, and the veins in her forehead distended with rage.

"Can Enrica be of my flesh and blood?" exclaimed the Marchesa in a low voice to the Cavaliere who now stood at her side. "Fool! She believes in her lover! It is a horrible sacrifice! Mark my words—a horrible sacrifice!"

Nobili and Enrica had taken their places behind the notary. The slanting shadows from the open door struck upon them with deeper gloom, and the low murmur of the fountain seemed now to form itself into a moan.

"Do I sign here?" asked Count Nobili.

Ser Giacomo trembled like a leaf.

"Yes, Excellency, you sign here," he stammered, pointing to the precise spot; but Ser Giacomo looked so terrified that Nobili, forgetting where he was, laughed out loud, and turned to Enrica, who laughed also.

"Stop that unseemly mirth," called out the Mar-

chesa from the sofa: "it is most indecent. Let the act that buries a great name at least be conducted with decorum."

"That great name shall not die," spoke the deep voice of Fra Pacifico from the back-ground; "I call a blessing upon it, and upon the present act. The name shall live. When we are dead, and rotting in our graves, a race shall rise from them"—and he pointed to Nobili and Enrica—"that shall recall the great legends of the past among the citizens of Lucca."

Fearful of what the Marchesa might be moved to reply (even the Marchesa however had a certain dread of Fra Pacifico when he assumed the dignity of his priestly office), Trenta hurried forward and offered his arm to lead her to the table. She rose slowly to her feet, and cast her eyes round at the group of happy faces round her; all happy save the poor notary, on whose forehead the big drops of heat were standing.

"Come, my daughter," said Fra Pacifico, advancing, "fear not to sign the marriage contract. Think of the blessings it will bring to hundreds of miserable peasants, who are suffering from your want of means to help them!"

"Fra Pacifico," exclaimed the Marchesa, scarcely able to control herself, "I respect your office, but

this is still my house, and I order you to be silent. Where am I to sign?"—she addressed herself to Ser Giacomo.

"Here, Madam," answered the almost inaudible voice of the notary.

The Marchesa took the pen, and in a large, firm hand wrote her full name and titles. She took a malicious pleasure in spreading them out over the page.

Enrica signed her name, in delicate little letters, after her aunt's. Count Nobili had already affixed his signature. Cavaliere Trenta and the priest were the witnesses.

"There is one request I would make, Marchesa," Nobili said, addressing her. "I shall await in Lucca the exact day you may please to name; but, Madam," and with a lover's ardour strong within him, he advanced nearer to where the Marchesa stood, and raised his hand as if to touch her,—"I beg you not to keep me waiting long."

The Marchesa drew back, and contemplated him with a haughty stare. His manner and his request were both alike offensive to her. She would have Count Nobili to understand that she would admit no shadow of familiarity; that her will had been forced, but that in all else she regarded him with the same animosity as before.

Nobili had understood her action and her meaning. "Devil!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. He hated himself for having been betrayed into the smallest warmth. With a flashing eye he turned from the Marchesa to Enrica, and whispered in her ear, "My only love, this is more than I can bear!"

Enrica had heard nothing. She had been lost in happy thoughts. In her mind a vision was passing. She was in the close street of San Simone, within its deep shadows that fell so early in the afternoon. Before her stood the two grim palaces, the cavernous doorways and the sculptured arms of the Guinigi displayed on both. One, her old home; the other, that was to be her home. She saw herself go in here, cross the pillared Court and mount upwards. It was neither day nor night, but all shone with crystal brightness;—then Nobili's voice came to her, and she roused herself.

"My love," he repeated, "I must go—I must go! I cannot trust myself a moment longer with——"

What he had on his lips need not be written. "That lady," he added, hastily correcting himself and he pointed to the Marchesa, who, led by the Cavaliere, had reseated herself upon the sofa, looking defiance at everybody.

396253A

"I have borne it all for your sake, Enrica." As Nobili spoke, he led her aside to one of the windows. "Now, good-bye," and his eyes gathered upon her with passionate fondness; "think of me day and night."

Enrica had not uttered a single word since she first entered, except to Nobili. When he spoke of parting, her head dropped on her breast. A dread —a horror came suddenly upon her. "Oh, Nobili, why must we part?"

"Scarcely to part," he answered pressing her hand—"Only for a few days; then always to be together."

Enrica tried to withdraw her hand from his, but he held it firmly. Then she turned away her head, and big tears rolled down her cheeks. When at last Nobili tore himself from her, Enrica followed him to the door, and regardless of her aunt's furious glances she kissed her hand, and waved it after him. There was a world of love in the action.

Spite of his indignation, Count Nobili did not fail duly to make his salutation to the Marchesa.

The Cavaliere and Fra Pacifico followed him out. Twilight now darkened the garden. The fragrance of the flowers was oppressive in the still air. A star or two had come out, and twinkled faintly on the broad expanse of deep blue sky.

The fountain murmured hollow in the silence of coming night.

"Good-bye," said Cavaliere Trenta to Nobili, in his thin voice. "I deeply regret the Marchesa's rudeness. She is unhinged,—quite unhinged—But her heart is excellent, believe me, most excellent."

"Do not talk of the Marchesa," exclaimed Nobili, as he rapidly ascended flight after flight of the terraces. "Let me forget her, or I shall never return to Corellia. Dio Sagrato!" and Nobili clenched his fist, "The Marchesa is the most cursed thing God ever created!"

CHAPTER VII.

The Club at Lucca.

THE Piazza at Lucca is surrounded by four avenues of plane-trees. In the centre stands the colossal statue of a Bourbon with dishevelled hair, —a cornucopia at her feet. Facing the west is the ducal Palace, a spacious modern building, in which the Sovereigns of Lucca kept a splendid court.—Here Cesare Trenta had flourished.—Opposite the Palace is the Hotel of the Universo, where, as we know, Count Montalto lodged at No. 4, on the second story. Midway in the Piazza a deep and narrow street dives into the body of the city—a street of many colours, with houses red, grey, brown, and tawny, mellowed and tempered by the hand of Time into rich tints that melt into warm shadows. In the background rise domes, and towers, and mediæval church-fronts, galleried and fretted with arches, pillars, and statues. Here a golden mosaic blazes in the sun,—yonder a brazen San Michele with outstretched arms rises against the sky; and scattered up and down, many a grand old palace-roof uprears its venerable front, with open pillared

belvedere, adorned with ancient frescoes. A dull, sleepy old city Lucca, but full of beauty!

On the opposite side of the Piazza, behind the plane-trees, stand two separate buildings, of no particular pretension, other than that both are of marble. One is the Theatre, the other is the Club. About the Club there is some attempt at ornamentation. A wide portico, raised on broad steps, runs along the entire front, supported by Corinthian columns. Under this portico there are orange-trees in green stands, rows of chairs, and tables laid with white table-cloths, plates, and napkins, ready for an al fresco meal.

It is five o'clock in the afternoon of a splendid day early in October—the next day, in fact, after the contract was signed at Corellia. The hour for the drive upon the ramparts at Lucca is not till six. This, therefore, is the favourite moment for a lounge at the Club. The portico is dotted with black coats and hats. Baldassare lay asleep between two chairs. He had arranged himself so as not to crease a pair of new trousers—all' Inglese—not that any Englishman would have worn such garments—they were too conspicuous; but his tailor tells him they are English, and Baldassare willingly believes him.

Baldassare is not a member, but he was admitted to the Club by the influence of his patron, the old

Chamberlain; not without protest, however, with the paternal shop close by. Being there, Baldassare stands his ground in a sullen, silent way. He has much jewellery about him, and wears many showy rings. Trenta says publicly that these rings are false; but Trenta is not at the Club to-day.

Lolling back in a chair near Baldassare, with his short legs crossed, and his thumbs stuck into the armholes of his coat, is Count Orsini—smiling, fat, and innocuous. His mother has not yet decided when he is to speak the irrevocable words to Teresa Ortolini. Orsini is far too dutiful a son to do so before she gives him permission. His mother might change her mind at the last moment; then Orsini would change his mind too, and burn incense on other altars. Orsini has a meerschaum between his teeth, from which he is puffing out columns of smoke. With his head thrown back, he is watching it as it curls upwards into the vaulted Portico. The languid young man, Orazio Franchi, supported by a stick, is at this moment ascending the steps. To see him drag one leg after the other, one would think his days were numbered. Not at all. Franchi is strong and healthy, but he cultivates languor as an accomplishment. Everybody at Lucca is idle, but nobody is languid, so Franchi has thought fit to adopt that line of distinction. His thin, lanky

arms, stooping figure, and a head set on a long neck that droops upon his chest,—as well as a certain indolent grace,—suit the *rôle*. When Franchi had mounted the steps he stood still, heaved an audible sigh of infinite relief, then he sank into a chair, leant back and closed his eyes. Count Malatesta, who was near, leaning against the wall behind, took his cigar from his mouth and laughed.

"Sù! — Via! — A little courage to bear the burden of a weary life. What has tired you, Orazio?"

"I have walked from the gate here," answered Orazio, without unclosing his eyes.

"Go on, go on," is Malatesta's reply, "Nothing like perseverance. You will lose the use of your limbs in time. It is this cursed air. Per Bacco!—it will infect me. Why, oh! why, my Penates, was I born at Lucca? It is the dullest place. No one ever draws a knife—or fights a duel—or runs away with his neighbour's wife. Why don't they?—It would be excitement. Cospetto! we marry, and are given in marriage, and breed like pigeons in our own holes. Come, Franchi, have you no news? Wake up, man! You are full of wickedness, spite of your laziness."

Franchi opened his eyes, stretched himself, then

yawned, and leant his head upon his arm that rested on one of the small tables near.

"News!—oh!—ah! There is plenty of news, but I am too tired to tell it."

"News! and I not know it!" cried Count Malatesta. Several others spoke, then all gathered round Franchi. Count Malatesta slapped Franchi on the back.

"Come, my Trojan, speak.—I insist upon it," said Orsini rising.

Franchi looked up at him. There was a French cook at Palazzo Orsini. No one had such Château Lafitte. Orazio is far from insensible to these blessings.

"Well,—Listen—Old Sansovino has returned to his villa at Riparata. His wife is with him."

"His wife!" shouted Orsini. "Chè, Chè! Any woman but his wife, and I'll believe you. Why, she has lived for the last fifteen years with Duke Bartolo at Venice. Sansovino did not mind the Duke, but he charged her with forgery. You remember? About her dower. There was a law-suit, I think. No, no—not his wife."

"Yes, his wife," answered Franchi, crossing his arms with great deliberation. "The Countess Sansovino was received by her attached husband with *bouquets*, and a band of music. She drove up to

the front door in gala,—in a four-in-hand, *à la Daumont*. All the tenantry were in waiting — her children too (each by a different father),—to receive her. It was most touching. Old Sansovino did it very well, they tell me. He clasped her to his heart, and melted into tears like a *père noble*."

"Oh Bello!" exclaimed Orsini, "if old Sansovino cried, it must have been with shame. After this I will believe anything."

"The Countess Sansovino is very rich," a voice remarked from the background.

"Well, if she forges I suppose so," another answered.

"Oh! Marriage, large are the folds of thy ample mantle!" cried Count Malatesta. "Who shall say we are not free in Italy? Now why do they not do this kind of thing in Lucca? Will anyone tell me? —I want to know."

There was a general laugh.

"Well, they may possibly do worse," said Franchi, languidly.

"What do you mean?" asked Malatesta sharply. "Is there more scandal?"

Franchi nodded. A crowd collected round him.

"How the devil, Franchi, do you know so much? Out with it! You must tell us."

"Give me time!—Give me time!" was Franchi's answer. He raised his head, and eyed them all with a look of feigned surprise. "Is it possible no one has heard it?"

He was answered by a general protest that nothing had been heard.

"Nobody knows what has happened at the Universo?"—Franchi asked with unusual energy.

"No, no," burst forth from Malatesta and Orsini. "No, no," sounded from behind.

"That is quite possible," continued Orazio, with a cynical smile. "To tell you the truth, I did not think you had heard it. It only happened half an hour ago."

"What happened?" asked Count Orsini.

"A secret commission has been sent from Rome." There was a breathless silence. "The Government is alarmed. A secret commission to examine Count Montalto's papers, and to imprison him."

"That's his uncle's doing — the Jesuit!" cried Malatesta. "This is the second time; Montalto will be shut up for life."

"Did they catch him?" asked Orsini.

"No; he got out of an upper window, and escaped across the roof. He had taken all the

upper floor of the Universo for his accomplices, who were expected from Paris."

"Honour to Lucca!" Malatesta put in; "we are progressing."

"He's gone," continued Orazio, falling back exhausted on his chair, "but his papers——" Here Franchi thought it right to pause and faintly wink. "I'll tell you the rest when I have smoked a cigar. Give me a light."

"No, no, you must smoke afterwards," said Orsini, rapping him smartly on the back. "Go on, —what about Montalto's papers?"

"Compromising, — very," — murmured Franchi, feebly, leaning back out of the range of Orsini's arm.

"'The red Count' was a Communist, we all know," observed Malatesta.

"*Mon cher!* he was a poet also," responded Orazio. Orazio's languor never interfered with his love of scandal. "When any lady struck his fancy, Montalto made a sonnet — a damaging practice. These sonnets are a diary of his life. The police were much diverted I assure you, and so was I. I was in the hotel;—I gave them the key to all the ladies."

"You might have done better than waste your

fine energies in making ladies' names public town talk," said Orsini, frowning.

"Well, that's a matter of opinion," replied Orazio, with a certain calm insolence peculiar to him. "I have no lady-love in Lucca."

"Delicious!" broke in Malatesta, brightening up all over. "Don't quarrel over a choice bone.—Who is compromised the most?—I'll have her name placarded. Some one must make a row."

"Enrica Guinigi is the most compromised," answered Orazio, striking a match to light his cigar. "Montalto celebrates her as the young Madonna before the Archangel Gabriel visited her. Ha! Ha!"

Malatesta gave a low whistle.

"Enrica Guinigi! Is not that the Marchesa's niece?" asked Orsini; "a pretty, fair-faced girl I see driving with her aunt on the ramparts sometimes?"

"The same," answered Malatesta. "But what, in the name of all the devils, could Montalto know of her? No one has ever spoken to her."

Baldassare now leant forward and listened; the name of Enrica woke him from his sleep. He hardly dared to join the circle formed round Franchi, for Franchi always snubbed him, and called him "Young Galipots," when Trenta was absent.

"Perhaps Montalto was the Archangel Gabriel himself," said Malatesta, with a leer.

"But answer my question," insisted Orsini, who, as an avowed suitor of Lucca maidens had their honour and good name at heart.—"Don't be a fool, but tell me what you know. This idle story involving the reputation of a young girl is shameful. I protest against it!"

"Do you?" sneered Orazio, leaning back, and pulling at his sandy moustache. "That is because you know nothing about it. This *Sainte Vierge* has already been much talked about—First, with Nobili, who lives opposite—when *ma tante* was sleeping. Then she spent a day with several men upon the Guinigi Tower, an elegant retirement among the crows. After that old Trenta offered her formally in marriage to Montalto."

"What!—After the Guinigi Tower?" put in Malatesta. "Of course Montalto refused her?"

"'Refused her, of course, with thanks.' So says the sonnet." Orazio went on to say all this in a calm, tranquil way, casting the bread of scandal on social waters as he puffed at his cigar. "It is very prettily rhymed—the sonnet—I have read it. The young Madonna is warmly painted. *Now why did Montalto refuse to marry her?* That is what I want

to know?" And Franchi looked round upon his audience with a glance of gratified malice.

"Even in Lucca!—Even in Lucca!" Malatesta clapped his hands and chuckled until he almost choked. "Laus Veneri!—the mighty Goddess!—She has reared an altar even here in this benighted city. I was a sceptic, but a Paphian miracle has converted me. I must drink a punch in honour of the great Goddess."

Here Baldassare rose and leant over from behind.

"I went up the Guinigi Tower with the party," he ventured to say. "There were four of us. The Cavaliere Trenta told me in the street just before 'That it was all right, and that the lady had agreed to marry Count Montalto.' There can be no secret about it now that every one knows it. Count Montalto raved so about the Signorina Enrica, he nearly jumped over the parapet."

"Better for her if you had helped him over," muttered Orazio, with a sarcastic stare. "The sonnet would not then have been written."

But Baldassare, conscious that he had intelligence that would make him welcome, stood his ground.

"You do not seem to know what has happened," he continued.

"More news!" cried Malatesta. "Gracious heavens! Wave after wave it comes!—a mighty sea. I hear the distant roar—It dashes high!—It breaks! —Speak,—oh! speak, Adonis!"

"The Marchesa Guinigi has left Lucca suddenly."

"Who cares? Do you, Pietrino?" asked Franchi of Orsini, with a contemptuous glance at Baldassare.

"Let him speak," cried Malatesta; "Baldassare is an Oracle."

"The Marchesa left Lucca suddenly," persisted Baldassare, not daring to notice Franchi's insolence. "She took her niece with her."

"Have it cried about the streets," interrupted Orazio opening his eyes.

"Yesterday morning an express came down for Cavaliere Trenta. The ancient tower of Corellia has been entirely burnt. The Marchesa was rescued."

"And the niece—is the niece gone to glory on the funeral pyre?"

"No," answered Baldassare, helplessly, settling his stupid eyes on Orazio, whose thrusts he could not parry. "She was saved by Count Nobili, who was accidentally shooting on the mountains near."

"Oh Bah!" cried Malatesta, with a knowing

grin—"I never believe in accidents. There is a ruling power—that power is love,—love—love."

"The Cavaliere is not yet returned."

"This is a strange story," said Orsini, gravely. "Nobili too, and Montalto—she must be a lively damsel. What will Nera Boccarini say to her truant knight, who rescues maidens *accidentally* on distant mountains? What had Nobili to do in the Garfagnana?"

"Ask him," lisped Orazio; "it will save more talking. I wish Nobili joy of his bargain," he added turning to Malatesta. "I wonder that he cares to take up with Montalto's leavings."

"Here's Farnese crossing the square—perhaps he can throw some light on this strange story," said Orsini.

Prince Farnese, still at Lucca, is on a visit to some relatives. He is, as I have said, decidedly horsey, and is much looked up to by the "golden youths," his companions, in consequence. As a gentleman rider at races and steeple-chases, as a hunter on the Roman Campagna, and the driver of a "Stage" on the Corso, Farnese is unrivalled. He breeds racers, and he has an English stud-groom, who has taught him to speak English with a drawl, enlivened by stable slang. He is slim, fair, and singularly awkward, and of a uniform pale yellow

—yellow complexion, yellow hair, and yellow eyebrows. Poole's clothes never fit him, and he walks, as he dances—with his legs far apart, as if a horse were under him. He carries a hunting crop in his hand spite of the month,—October—(these little anomalies are undetected in New Italy where there is so much to learn). Prince Farnese swings round this crop as he mounts the steps of the club. The others, who are watching his approach, are secretly devoured with envy.

"Wall Pietrino—Wall Beppo," said Farnese, shaking hands with Orsini and Malatesta, and nodding to Orazio, out of whose sails he took the wind by force of stolid indifference.—Baldassare he ignored, or mistook him for a waiter, if he saw him at all. —"You are all discussing the news, of course. Lucca's lively to-day. You'll all do in time,—even to steeplechases. We must run one down on the low grounds in the Spring. Dick, my English groom, is always plaguing me about it."

Then Prince Farnese pulled himself together with a jerk, as a man does stiff from the saddle, laid his hunting-crop upon a table, stuffed his hands into his pockets, and looked round.

"What news have you heard?" asked Beppo Malatesta. "There's such a lot."

"Wall the news I have heard is, that Count

Nobili is engaged to marry the Marchesa Guinigi's little niece. Dear little thing they say—like an English '*mees*'—fair, with red hair."

"Is that your style of beauty?" lisped Orazio, looking hard at him. But Farnese did not notice him.

"But that's not half," cried Malatesta. "You are an innocent, Farnese. Let me baptise you with scandal."

"Don't, don't, I hate scandal," said Farnese, taking one of his hands out of his pocket for a moment, and holding it up in remonstrance. "There is nothing but scandal in these small Italian towns. Take to hunting—that's the cure. Nobili is to marry the little girl, that's certain. He's to pay off all the Marchesa's debts—that's certain too. He's rich, she's poor. He wants blood—she has got it."

"I do not believe in this marriage," said Orazio, measuring Prince Farnese as he stood erect, his slits of eyes without a shadow of expression. "You remember the ball-room, Prince? And the Boccarini family grouped?—And Nobili crying in a corner? Nobili will marry the Boccarini. She is a stunner."

After Orazio had ventured this observation about Nera Boccarini, Prince Farnese brought his small steely eyes to bear upon him with a fixed stare.

Orazio affected total unconsciousness, but he quailed inwardly. The others silently watched Farnese. He took up his hunting-crop and whirled it in the air dangerously near Orazio's head, eyeing him all the while as a dog eyes a rat he means to crunch between his teeth.

"Whoever says that Count Nobili will marry the Boccarini is a liar."

Prince Farnese spoke with perfect composure, still whirling his whip. "I shall be happy to explain my reason anywhere, out of the city, on the shortest notice."

Orazio started up—"Prince Farnese, do you call me a liar?"

"I beg your pardon," replied Farnese quite unmoved, making Orazio a mock bow. "Did you say whom Count Nobili would marry? If you did, will you favour me by repeating it."

"I only report town talk," Franchi answered sullenly. "I am not answerable for town talk."

Farnese was a dead shot; Orazio only fought with words.

"Then I am satisfied," replied Farnese—quiet defiance in his look and tone. "I accuse you, Signor Orazio Franchi, of nothing. I only warn you."

"I don't see why we should quarrel about Nobili's

marriage. He will be here himself presently, to explain which of the ladies he prefers," observed the peaceable Orsini.

"I don't know which lady Count Nobili prefers," retorted Farnese doggedly. "But I tell you the name of the lady he is to marry. It is Enrica Guinigi."

"Why, there is Count Nobili," cried Baldassare quite loud, "there—under the plane-trees."

"Bravo, Adonis!" cried Beppo; "your eyes are as sharp as your feet are swift."

Nobili crossed the square; he was coming towards the Club. Every face was turned towards him. He had come down to Lucca like one maddened by the breath of love. All along the road he had felt drunk with happiness. To him love was everywhere—in the deep gloom of the mountain forests, in the flowing river, diamonded with light under the pale moonbeams; in the splendour of the starry sky, in midnight dreams of bliss, and in the awakening of glorious morning. The two old palaces were full of love;—the Moorish garden—the magnolias that overtopped the wall, and the soft, creamy perfume that wafted from them—the very street through which he should lead her home—everyone he saw—all he said, thought, or did,—it was all love and Enrica!

Now, having with lover's haste made good progress with all he had to do, Nobili has come down to the Club to meet his friends, and to receive their congratulations. Every hand is stretched out towards him. Even Farnese, spite of obvious jealousy, liked him. Nobili's face is lit up with his sunniest smile. Having shaken hands with him, an ominous silence ensues. Orsini and Malatesta suddenly find that their cigars want re-lighting, and turn aside. Orazio seats himself at a distance, and scowls at Prince Farnese. Nobili gives a quick glance round. An instant tells him that something is wrong.

Prince Farnese breaks the awkward silence. He walks up, looks at Nobili with immoveable gravity, then slaps him on the shoulder.

"I congratulate you, Nobili. I hear you are to marry the Marchesa Guinigi's niece."

"Balduccio, I thank you. Within a week I hope to bring her home to Lucca. There will then be but one Guinigi home in the two palaces. The Marchesa makes her heiress of all she possesses."

Prince Farnese is satisfied. Now he will back Count Nobili to any odds. He will name his next foal Mario Nobili.

Again Nobili glances round; this time there is the shadow of a frown upon his smooth brow. Orsini feels that he must speak.

"Have you known the lady long?" Orsini asks, with an embarrassment quite foreign to him.

"Yes, and No," answers Nobili, reddening, and scanning the veiled expression on Orsini's face with intense curiosity. "But the matter has been brought to a crisis by the accidental burning of the Marchesa's house at Corellia. I was present. I saved her niece."

"I thought it was rather sudden," says Orazio from behind in a tone full of suggestion. "We were in doubt, before you came, to whom the lady was engaged."

Nobili starts.

"What do you mean?" he asks, hastily.

The colour has left his cheeks; his blue eyes grow dark.

"There has been some foolish gossip from persons who know nothing," Orsini answers, advancing to the front. "About some engagement with another gentleman, whom she had accepted——"

"Nonsense! Don't listen to him, my good fellow," breaks in Farnese. "These lads have nothing to do but to breed scandal. They would slander the Virgin; not for wickedness, but for idleness. I mean to make them hunt. Hunting is the cure."

Nobili stands as if turned to stone.

"But I must listen," replies Nobili, fiercely, fire flaming in his eyes. "This lady's honour is my own. Who has dared to couple her name with any other man? Orsini,—Farnese,"—and he turns to them in great excitement,—"you are my friends. What does this mean?"

"Nothing," said Orsini, trying to smile, but not succeeding. "I hear, Nobili, you have behaved with extraordinary generosity," he adds, fencing the question.

"Yes, by Jove," adds Prince Farnese.—Farnese was leaning up against a pillar watching Orazio as he would a mischievous cur. "A most suitable marriage. Not that I care a button for blood, except in horses."

Nobili has not moved, but, as each speaks, his eye shifts rapidly from one to the other. His face from pale grows livid, and there is a throb about his temples that sounds in his ears like a thousand hammers.

"Orsini," Nobili says, sternly, "I address myself to you. You are the oldest here. You are the first man I knew after I came to Lucca. You are all concealing something from me. I entreat you, Orsini, as man to man, tell me whose name has been coupled with that of my affianced wife? That it is a lie I know beforehand,—a base and pal-

pable lie! She has been reared at home in perfect solitude."

Nobili spoke with passionate vehemence. The hot blood rushed over his face and neck, and tingled to his very fingers. Now he glances from man to man in an appeal defiant, yet pleading, pitiful to behold. Every face grew grave.

Orsini is the first to reply.

"I feel deeply for you, Nobili. We all love you."

"Yes, all," responded Malatesta and Farnese speaking together.

"You must not attach too much importance to idle gossip," says Orsini.

"No, no," cried Farnese, "don't. I will stand by you, Nobili. I know the lady by sight—a little English beauty."

"Scandal! Who is the man? By God, I'll have his blood within this very hour!"

Nobili is now wrought up beyond all endurance.

"You can't," says Orazio Franchi, tapping his heel upon the marble pavement—"He's gone."

"Gone! I'll follow him to hell!" roars Nobili. "Who is he?"

"Possibly he may find his own way there in time," answers Orazio, with a sneer. He rises so as

to increase the distance between himself and Prince Farnese.—"But as yet the wretch crawls on mother earth."

"Silence, Orazio!" shouts Farnese, "or you may go there yourself quicker than Montalto."

"Montalto! Is that the name?" cries Nobili, with a hungry eye, that seems to thirst for vengeance. "Who is Montalto?"

"This is some horrid fiction," Nobili mutters to himself. Stay! — Where had he heard that name lately? He gnawed his fingers until the blood came, and a crimson drop fell upon the marble floor. Suddenly an icy chill rose at his heart. He could not breathe. He sank into a chair — then rose again, and stood before Orsini with a face out of which ten years of youth had fled. Yes, Montalto—that is the very man Enrica had mentioned to him under the trees at Corellia. Each letter of it blazes in fire before his eyes. Yes—she had said "Montalto had read her eyes." "O God!" and Nobili groans aloud, and buries his face within his hands.

"You take this too much to heart, my dear Mario," Count Orsini said, "indeed you do, else I would not say so. Remember there is nothing proved. Be careful," Orsini whispered in the other's

ear, glancing round. Every eye was riveted on Nobili.

Orsini felt that Nobili had forgotten the public place and the others present—such as Count Malatesta, Orazio Franchi, and Baldassare, who, though they had not spoken, had devoured every word.

"It is nothing but a sonnet found among Montalto's papers." Orsini now was speaking. "Montalto has fled from the police. Nothing but a sonnet addressed to the lady—a poet's day-dream, —untrue of course."

"Will no one tell me what the sonnet said?" demanded Nobili. He had mastered himself for the moment.

"Stuff, stuff," cried Farnese. "Every pretty woman has heaps of sonnets and admirers. It is a brevet of beauty. After all this row, it was only an offer of marriage made to Count Montalto and refused by him. Probably the lady never knew it."

"Oh, yes, she did, she accepted him," sounded from behind. It was Baldassare, whose vanity was piqued because no one had referred to him for information.

"Accepted! Refused by Count Montalto!" Nobili caught and repeated the words in a voice so strange, it sounded like the echo from a vault.

"Wall! by Jove! It's five o'clock!" exclaimed

Prince Farnese looking at his watch. "My dear fellow," he said, addressing Nobili, "I have an appointment on the ramparts; will you go with me?" He passed his arm through that of Nobili. It was a painful scene, which Farnese desired to end.—Nobili shook his head. He was so stunned and dazed he could not speak,

"If it is five o'clock," said Malatesta, "I must go too."

Malatesta drew Nobili a little apart. "Don't think too much of this, Nobili. It will all blow over and be forgotten in a month. Take your wife a trip to Paris or London. We shall hear no more of it, believe me. Good-bye."

"Count Nobili," called out Franchi, from the other end of the portico, making a languid bow. "After all that I have heard, I congratulate you on your marriage most sincerely."

Nobili did not hear him. All were gone. He was alone with Farnese. His head had dropped upon his breast. There was the shadow of a tear in Prince Farnese's steely eye. It was not enough to be brushed off, for it absorbed itself and came to nothing, but it was there nevertheless.

"Well, Mario," he said, apparently unmoved, "it seems to me the Club is made too hot to hold you. Come home."

Nobili nodded. He was so weak he had to hang heavily on Prince Farnese's arm as they crossed the Piazza. Prince Farnese did not leave him until he saw him safe to his own door.

"You will judge what is right to do," were Farnese's last words. "But do not be guided by those young scamps. They live in mischief. If you love the girl, marry her—that is my advice."

CHAPTER VIII.

Count Nobili's Thoughts.

I HAVE seen a valley canopied by a sky of blue and opaline—girt in by wooded heights on which the sun poured down in midday splendour. A broad river sparkled downwards, giving back ray for ray. The forest glowed without a shadow. Each little detail of leaf or stone, even a blade of grass, was turned to flame. The corn lay smooth and golden. The grapes and olives hung safe upon the branch. The flax—a goodly crop—reached to the trees. The peasants laboured in the rich brown soil, singing to the oxen. The women sat spinning beside their doors. A little maid led out her snowy lamb to graze among the woods, and children played at "morra" beside the river, which ran at peace, lapping the silver sand.

A cloud gathers behind a mountain—yonder,—where they come interlacing down, narrowing the valley. It was a little cloud—no one observed it; yet it gathers and spreads and blackens, until the sky is veiled. The sun grows pale. A greenish light steals over the earth. In the still air there is

a sudden freshness. The tall canes growing in the brakes among the vineyards rustle as if shaken by a spectral hand. The white-leaved aspens quiver. An icy wind sweeps down the mountain sides. A flash of lightning shoots across the sky. Then the storm bursts. Thunder rolls, and cracks, and crashes—as if the brazen gates of Heaven clashed to and fro. The peasants fly, driving their cattle before them. The pigs run grunting homewards. The helpless lamb is stricken where it stood, crouching in a deep gorge; the little maid sits weeping by. Down beats the hail like pebbles. It strikes upon the vines, scorches and blackens them. The wheat is levelled to the ground. The river suddenly swells into a raging torrent. Its turbid waters bear away the riches of the poor—the cow that served a little household and followed the children, lowing, to reedy meadows bathed by limpid streams — A horse caught browsing in a peaceful vale, thinking no ill—great trees hurling destruction with them,—rafters,—roofs of houses, —sometimes a battered corpse—float by.

The roads are broken up. The bridge is snapped. Years will not repair the fearful ravage. The evening sun sets on a desolate waste. Men sit along the roadside wringing their hands beside their ruined crops. Children creep out upon their naked feet,

and look and wonder. Where is the little kid that ran before and licked their hands?—Where is the grey-skinned, soft-eyed cow that hardly needed a cord to lead her?—The shapely cob,—so brave with its tinkling bells and crimson tassels?—The cob that Daddy drove to market, and many merry fairs? Gone with the storm—all gone!"——

* * * * * *

Count Nobili was like the Italian climate,—in extremes. Like his native soil, he must live in the sunshine. His was not a nature to endure a secret sorrow. He must be kissed, caressed, and smoothed by tender hands and loving voices. He must have applause, approval,—be flattered, envied, and followed. Hitherto all this had come naturally to him. His gracious temper, generous heart, and great wealth, had made all bright about him. Now a sudden storm had swept over him and brought despair into his heart.

When Prince Farnese left him, Nobili felt as battered and sore as if a whirlwind had caught him, then let him go, and he had dropped to earth a broken man. Yet in the turmoil of his brain a pale, scared little face with wild beseeching eyes was ever before him. It would not leave him. What was this horrible nightmare that had come over him in the hey-day of his joy? It was so

vague,—yet so tangible if judged by its effect on others. Others held Enrica dishonoured—that was clear. Was she dishonoured? He was bound to her by every tie of honour. He loved her. She had a charm for him no other woman ever possessed, and she loved him. A woman's eye, he told himself, had never deceived him. Yes, she loved him. Yet if Enrica were as guileless as she seemed, how could she conceal from him she had another lover—less loved perhaps than he,—but still a lover? And this lover had refused to marry her? That was the stab. That everyone in Lucca should know his future bride had been scouted by another man who had turned a rhyme upon her, and left her! Could he bear this?

What were Enrica's relations with Montalto? Some one had said she had accepted him. Nobili was sure he had heard this. He, Montalto, must have approached her nearly by her own confession. He had celebrated her in sonnets, amorous sonnets —Damnable thought!—Gone with her to the Guinigi tower!—Then rejected her! A mist seemed to gather about Nobili as he thought of this. He grew stupid in long vistas of speculation. Had Enrica not dared to meet him—Nobili—clandestinely? Was not this very act unmaidenly? (Such are men; they urge the slip, the fall,—then judge a woman by the force

of their own urging!) Had Enrica met Montalto in secret also? No—impossible! The scared, white face was before Nobili, now plainer than ever. No —he hated himself for the very thought. All the chivalry of his nature rose up to acquit her.

Still there was a mystery. How far was Enrica concerned in it? Would she have married Count Montalto? Trenta was away, or he would question him? *Had he better ask? What might he hear?* Some one had deceived him grossly. The Marchesa would stick at nothing; yet what could the Marchesa have done without Enrica? Nobili was perplexed beyond expression. He buried his head within his arms, and leant upon a table in an agony of doubt. Then he paced up and down the splendid room, painted with frescoed walls, and hung with rose and silver draperies from Paris (it was to have been Enrica's boudoir) looking south into a delicious town garden, with statues, and flower-beds, and terraces of marble diamonded in brilliant colours. To be so cheated!—To be the laughing-stock of Lucca? Good God! how could he bear it? To marry a wife who would be pointed at with whispered words! Of all earthly things this was the bitterest! Could he bear it?—and Enrica—would she not suffer? And if she did, what then?—Why, she deserved it—she must deserve it, else why was she

accused? Enrica was treacherous—the tool of her aunt. He could not doubt it. If she cared for him at all, it was for the sake of his money—hateful thought!—Yet, having signed the contract, he supposed he *must* give her the name of wife. But the future mother of his children was branded——

Oh the golden days at mountain-capped Corellia! —That watching in the perfumed woods—that pleading with the stars that shone over Enrica to bear her his love-sick sighs! Oh, the triumph of saving her dear life!—The sweetness of her lips in that first embrace under the magnolia tree! Fra Pacifico too, with his honest, sturdy ways—and the white-haired Cavaliere,—so wise and courteous. Cheats, cheats—all! It made him sick to think how they must have laughed and jeered at him when he was gone. Oh! it was damnable!

His teeth were set. He started up as if he had been stung, and stamped upon the floor. Then like a madman he rushed up and down the spacious floor. After a time, brushing the drops of perspiration from his forehead, Nobili grew calmer. He sat down to think.

Must he marry Enrica?—he asked himself, (He had come to that)—marry the lady of the sonnet—Montalto's love? He did not see how he could help it. The contract was signed, and nothing proved

against her. Well—life was long, and the world wide, and full of pleasant things. Well,—he must bear it—unless there had been sin! Nobili did not see it, nor did he hear it,—but much that is never seen, nor heard, nor known, is yet true,—horribly true.—He did not see it, but as he thought these cruel thoughts, and hardened himself in them, a pale, scared face, with wild, pleading eyes, vanished with a shriek of anguish.

Others had loved him well, Nobili reasoned,—other women—"*Not so well as I*," an inaudible voice would have whispered, but it was no longer there to answer—others that had not been rejected;—others fairer than Enrica—Nera!

With that name there came a world of comfort to him. Nera loved him—she loved him! He had not seen Nera since that memorable night she lay like one dead before him. Before he took a final resolve (by-and-by he must investigate, inquire, know when, and how, and by whom, all this talk had come) would it not be well to see Nera? It was a duty, he told himself, he owed her; a duty delayed too long; only Enrica had so absorbed him. Nera would have heard the town-talk. How would she take it? Would she be glad? or sorry? he wondered. Then came a longing upon Nobili he could not resist to know if Nera still loved him. If so,

what constancy! It deserved reward. He had treated her shamefully. How sweet her company would be if she would see him! At all events, he could but try. At this point he rose and rang the bell.

When the servant came Nobili ordered his dinner. He was hungry, he said, and would eat at once. His carriage he should require later.

CHAPTER IX.

Nera.

CLOSE to the Church of San Michele, where a brazen Archangel with outstretched wings, flaunts in the blue sky,—is the narrow crypt-like street of San Salvador. Here stands the Boccarini Palace. It is an ancient structure, square and large, with an overhanging roof and open pillared gallery. On the first floor there is a stone balcony. Four rows of windows divide the front. The lower ones, barred with iron, are dismal to the eye. Over the principal entrance are the Boccarini arms, carved on a stone escutcheon, supported by two angels, the whole so moss-eaten the details cannot be traced. Above, is a Marquis's coronet in which a swallow has built its nest. Both in and out it is a house where poverty has set its seal. The family is dying out. When Marchesa Boccarini dies, the palace will be sold, and the money divided among her daughters.

As dusk was settling into night a carriage rattled along the deserted street. The horses—a pair of splendid bays—struck sparks out of the

granite pavement. With a bang they draw up at the entrance, under an archway, guarded by a *grille* of rusty iron. A bell is rung; it only echoes through the gloomy court. The bell was rung again, but no one came. At last steps were heard, and a dried-up old man, with a face like parchment, and little ferret eyes, appeared, hastily dragging his arms into a coat much too large for him.

He shuffled to the front and bowed. Taking a key from his pocket he unlocked the iron gates, then planted himself on the threshold, and turned his ear towards the well-appointed brougham, and Count Nobili seated within.

"Do the ladies receive?" Nobili called out. The old man nodded, bringing his best ear and ferret eyes to bear upon him.

"Yes, the ladies do receive. Will the Excellency descend?"

Count Nobili jumped out and hurried through the archway into a court surrounded by a colonnade.

It is very dark. The palace rises upwards four lofty stories. Above is a square patch of sky, on which a star trembles. The court is full of damp unwholesome odours. The foot slips upon the

slimy pavement. Nobili stopped. The old man came limping after, buttoning his coat together.

"Ah! Poor me!—the Excellency is young!"

He spoke in the odd, muffled voice, peculiar to the deaf. "The Excellency goes so fast he will fall if he does not mind. Our courtyard is very damp; the stairs are old."

"Which is the way upstairs?" Nobili asked, impatiently. "It is so dark, I have forgotten the turn."

"Here, Excellency,—here to the right. By the Madonna there, in the niche, with the light before it. A thousand excuses. The Excellency will excuse me, but I have not yet lit the lamp on the stairs. I was resting. There are so many visitors to the Signora Marchesa. The Excellency will not tell the Signora Marchesa that it was dark upon the stairs? Per Pieta!"

The shrivelled old man placed himself full in Nobili's path, and held out his hands like claws entreatingly.

"A thousand devils!—No," was Nobili's irate reply, pushing him back. "Let me go up; I shall say nothing. Cospetto! What is it to me?"

"Thanks! thanks! The Excellency is full of mercy to an old over-worked servant. There was a time when the Boccarini——"

Nobili did not wait to hear more, but strode through the darkness at hazard, to find the stairs.

"Stop! Stop! the Excellency will break his limbs against the wall," the old man shouted.

He fumbled in his pocket, and drew out some matches. He struck one against the wall, held it above his head, and pointed with his bony finger to a broad stone stair under an inner arch.

Nobili ascended rapidly; he was in no mood for delay. The old man, standing at the foot, struck match after match to light him.

"Above, Excellency, you will find our usual lamps. You must go on to the second story."

On the landing at the first floor there was still a little daylight from a window as big as if set in the tribune of a cathedral. Here, a lamp was placed on an old painted table. Some moth-eaten tapestry hung from a mildewed wall. Here and there a rusty nail had given way, and the stuff fell in downward folds. Nobili paused. His head was hot and dizzy. He had dined well, and he had drunk freely. His eyes travelled upwards to the old tapestry—(it was the daughter of Herodias dancing before Herod the can-can of the day). Something in the face and figure of the girl recalled Nera to him, or he fancied it,—his mind being full of her. Nobili envied Herod in a dreamy

way, who, with round, leaden eyes, a crown upon his head,—watched the dancing girl as she flung about her lissome limbs. Nobili envied Herod,—and the thought came across him,—how pleasant it would be to sit royally enthroned, and see Nera gambol so! From that,—quicker than I can write it,—his thoughts travelled backwards to that night when he had danced with Nera at the Orsini Ball. Again the refrain of that waltz buzzed in his ear. Again the measure rose and fell in floods of luscious sweetness—again Nera lay within his arms—her breath was on his cheek—the perfume of the flowers in her flossy hair was wafted in the air—the blood stirred in his veins——

The old man said truly. All the way up the second stair was lit by little lamps, fed by mouldy oil; and all the way up that waltz rang in Nobili's ear. It mounted to his brain like fumes of new wine tapped from the skin. A green door of faded baize faced him on the upper landing, and another bell—a red tassel fastened to a bit of whipcord. He rang it hastily. This time a servant came promptly. He carried in his hand a lamp of brass.

"Did the ladies receive?"

"They did," was the answer; and the servant

held the lamp aloft to light Nobili into the ante-room.

This ante-room was as naked as a barrack. The walls were painted in a Raphaelesque pattern, the coronet and arms of the Boccarini in the centre.

Count Nobili and the servant passed through many lofty rooms of faded splendour. Chandeliers hung from vaulted ceilings, and reflected the light of the brass lamp on a thousand crystal facets. The tall mirrors in the antique frames repeated it. In a cavern-like saloon, hung with rows of dark pictures upon amber satin, Nobili and the servant stopped before a door. The servant knocked. A voice said, "Enter." It is the voice of Marchesa Boccarini. She was sitting with her three daughters. A lamp, with a coloured shade, stands in the centre of a small room bearing some aspect of life and comfort. The Marchesa and two of her daughters were working at some mysterious garments, which rapidly vanished out of sight. Nera was leaning back on a sofa, superbly idle—staring idly at an opposite window, where the daylight still lingered. When Count Nobili was announced, they all rose and spoke together with the loud peacock voices, and the rapid utterance, which in Italy are supposed to mark a special welcome. Strange that

in the land of song the talking voices of women should be so harsh and strident! Yet so it is.

"How long is it since we have seen you, Count Nobili?" It was the sad-faced Marchesa who spoke, and tried to smile a welcome to him. "I have to thank you for many inquiries, and all sorts of luxuries sent to my dear child. But we expected you. You never came."

The two sisters echoed, "You never came."

Nera did not speak then, but when they had finished, she rose from the sofa and stood before Nobili drawn up to her full height, radiant in sovereign beauty. "I have to thank you most." As Nera spoke, her cheeks flushed, and she dropped her hand into his. It was a simple act, but full of purpose as Nera did it. Nera intended it should be so. She reseated herself. As his eye met hers, Nobili grew crimson. The twilight and the shaded lamp hid this in part, but Nera observed it, and noted it for future use.

Count Nobili placed himself beside the Marchesa.

"I am overwhelmed with shame," he said. "What you say is too true. I had intended coming. Indeed, I waited until your daughter"—and he glanced at Nera—"could receive me, and satisfy me herself she

was not hurt. I longed to make my penitent excuses for the accident."

"Oh! it was nothing," said Nera, with a smile, answering for her mother.

"What I suffered, no words can tell," continued Nobili. "Even now I shudder to think of it—to be the cause——"

"No, not the cause," answered Marchesa Boccarini.

The elder sisters echoed,

"Not the cause."

"It was the ribbon," continued the Marchesa. "Nera was entangled with the ribbon when she rose; she did not know it."

"I ought to have held her up," returned Nobili with a glance at Nera, who, with a kind of queenly calm looked him full in the face with her bold, black eyes.

"I assure you, Marchesa, it was the horror of what I had done that kept me from calling on you."

This was not true, and Nera knew it was not true. Nobili had not come because he dreaded his weakness and her power. Nobili had not come because he doted on Enrica to that excess, a thought alien to her seemed then to him a crime. What folly! Now he knew Enrica better! All that was changed.

"We have felt very grateful," went on to say the Marchesa, "I assure you, Count Nobili, very grateful."

The poor lady was much exercised in spirit as to how she could frame an available excuse for leaving the Count alone with Nera. Had she only known beforehand she would have arranged a little plan to do so, naturally. But it must be done she knew. It must be done at any price, or Nera would never forgive her.

"You have been so agreeably occupied too," Nera said, in a firm, full voice. "No wonder, Count Nobili, you had no time to visit us."

There was a mute reproach in these few words that made Nobili wince.

"I have been absent," he replied, much confused.

"Yes, absent in mind and body," and Nera laughed a cruel little laugh. "You have been at Corellia, I believe?" she added significantly, fixing him with her lustrous eyes.

"Yes, I have been at Corellia, shooting." Nobili shrank from shame at the lack of courtesy on his part which had made these social lies needful. How brilliant Nera was! A type of perfect womanhood. Fresh, and strong, and healthy—a mother for heroes.

"We have heard of you," went on Nera, throw-

ing her grand head backwards, a quiet deliberation in each word, as if she were dropping them out, word by word, like poison. "A case of Perseus and Andromeda, only you rescued the lady from the flames. You half killed me, Count Nobili, and *en revanche* you have saved another lady. She must be very grateful."

"Oh, Nera!" one of her sisters exclaimed reproachfully. These innocent sisters never could accommodate themselves to Nera's caustic tongue.

Nera gave her sister a look. She rose at once; then the other sister rose also. They both slipped out of the room.

"Now," thought the Marchesa, "I must go too."

"May I be permitted," she said rising,—"before I leave the room to speak to my confessor, who is waiting for me, on a matter of business." (This was an excellent sham, and sounded decorous and natural),—"May I be permitted, Count Nobili, to congratulate you on your approaching marriage? I do not know Enrica Guinigi, but I hear that she is lovely."

Nobili bowed with evident constraint.

"And I," said Nera softly, directing a broadside upon him from her brilliant eyes—"Allow me to congratulate you also."

"Thank you," murmured Nobili, scarcely able to form the words.

"Excuse me," the Marchesa said. She curtsied to Nobili and left the room.

Nobili and Nera were now alone. Nobili watched her under his eyelids. Yes—she was splendid. A luxuriant form, a skin mellow and ruddy as a ripe peach—and such eyes!

Nera was silent. She guessed his thoughts. She knew men so well. Men had been her special study. Nera was only twenty-four, but she was clever, and would have excelled in anything she pleased. To draw men to her,—as the magnet draws the needle, was the passion of her life; whether she cared for them or not—to draw them. Not to succeed argued a want of skill. That maddened her. She was keen and hot upon the scent, knocking over her man as a sportsman does his bird—full in the breast. Her aim was marriage. Count Nobili would have suited her exactly. She had felt for him a warmth that rarely quickened her pulses. Nobili had evaded her. But revenge is sweet. Now his hour is come.

"Count Nobili"—Nera's tempting looks spoke more than words—"Come and sit down by me." She signed to him to place himself upon the sofa.

Nobili rose as she bid him. He came upon his

fate without a word. Seated so near to Nera, he gazed into her starry eyes, and felt it did him good.

"You look ill," Nera said, tuning her voice to a tone of tender pity; "you have grown older too since I last saw you. Is it love, or grief, or jealousy, or what?"

Nobili heaved a deep sigh. His hand, which rested near hers, slipped forward, and touched her fingers. Nera withdrew them to smooth the braids of her glossy hair. While she did so she scanned Nobili closely. "You are not a triumphant lover, certainly. What is the matter?"

"You are very good to care," answered Nobili, sighing again, gazing into her face; "Once I thought that my fate did touch you."

"Yes, once," Nera rejoined. "Once,—long ago." She gave an airy laugh that grated on Nobili's ears. "But we meet so seldom."

"True, true," he answered hurriedly, "too seldom." His manner was most constrained. It was plain his mind was running upon some unspoken thought.

"Yes," Nera said. "Spite of your absence however you make yourself remembered. You give us so much to talk of! Such a succession of surprises!"

One by one Nera's phrases dropped out, suggesting so much behind.

Nobili, greatly excited, felt he must speak or flee.

"I must confess," she added, giving a stealthy glance out of the corners of her eyes, "you have surprised me. When do you bring your wife home, Count Nobili?" As Nera asked this question she bent over Nobili, so that her breath just swept his heated cheek.

"Never perhaps!" cried Nobili, wildly. He could contain himself no longer. His heart beat almost to bursting. A desperate seduction was stealing over him. "Never perhaps!" he repeated.

Nera gave a little start; then she drew back and leant against the sofa, gazing at him.

"I am come to you, Nera,"—Nobili spoke in a hoarse voice—his features worked with agitation—"I am come to tell you all. To ask you what I shall do. I am distracted, heart-broken, degraded! Nera, dear Nera,—will you help me? In mercy say you will!"

He had grasped her hand—he was covering it with hot kisses. He was so heated with wine and beauty, and a sense of wrong, he had lost all self-command.

Nera did not withdraw her hand. Her eyelids dropped, and she replied, softly,

"Help you? Oh! so willingly. Could you see my heart you would understand me."

She stopped.

"You can make all right," urged Nobili maddened by her seductions.

Again that waltz was buzzing in his ears. Nobili was about to clasp her in his arms, and ask her he knew not what, when Nera rose and seated herself upon a chair opposite to him.

"You leave me," cried Nobili, piteously, seizing her dress. "That is not helping me."

"I must know what you want," she answered, settling the folds of her dress about her. "Of course, in making this marriage, you have weighed all the consequences? I take that for granted."

As Nera spoke she leaned her head upon her hand; the rich beauty of her face was brought under the lamp's full light.

"I thought I had," was Nobili's reply, recalled by her movement to himself, and speaking with more composure. "I thought I had,—but within the last three hours everything is changed. I have been insulted at the Club."

"Ah!—You must expect that sort of thing if you marry Enrica Guinigi. That is inevitable."

Nobili knit his brows. This was hard from her.

"What reason do you give for this?" he asked, trying to master his feelings. "I came to ask you this."

"Reason, my dear Count?" and a smile parted Nera's lips. "A very obvious reason. Why force me to name it? No one can respect you if you make such a marriage. You will be always liked —you are so charming." She paused to fling an amorous glance upon him. "Why did you select the Guinigi girl?" The question was sharply put. "The Marchesa would never receive you. Why choose her niece?"

"Because I liked her." Nobili was driven to bay. "A man chooses the woman he likes."

"How strange!" exclaimed Nera, throwing up her hands. "How strange!—A pale-faced school-girl! But—Ha! Ha!"—(that discordant laugh almost betrayed her)—"She is not so, it seems."

Nobili changed colour. With every word Nera uttered he grew hot or cold, soothed or wild, by turns. Nera watched it all. She read Nobili like a book.

"How cunning Enrica Guinigi must be!—Very cunning!" Nera repeated as if the idea had just struck her. "The Marchesa's tool!—They are so

poor!—Her niece! Chè vuole!—the family blood! Anyhow, Enrica has caught you, Nobili."

Nera leant back, drew out a fan from behind a cushion, and swayed it to and fro.

"Not yet," gasped Nobili,—"not yet."

And Nobili had listened to Nera's cruel words, and had not risen up and torn out the lying tongue that uttered them!—He had sat and heard Enrica torn to pieces as a panting dove is severed by a hawk limb by limb!—Even now Nobili's better nature,—spite of the glamour of this woman,—told him he was a coward to listen to such words, but his good angel had veiled her wings and fled.

"I am glad you say 'not yet.' I hope you will take time to consider. If I can help you, you may command me, Count Nobili." And Nera paused and sighed.

"Help me, Nera!—You can save me!" He started to his feet. "I am so wretched—so wounded—so desperate!"

"Sit down," she answered, pointing to the sofa.

Mechanically he obeyed.

"You are nothing of all this if you do not marry Enrica Guinigi; if you do, you are all you say."

"What am I to do?" exclaimed Nobili. "I have signed the contract."

"Break it,"—Nera spoke the words boldly out. —"Break it,—or you will be dishonoured. Do you think you can live in Lucca with a wife that you have bought?"

Nobili bounded from his chair.

"O God!" he said, and clenched his hands.

"You must be calm," she said hastily, "or my mother will hear you." (All she can do, she thinks, is not worse than Nobili deserves, after that ball.) "Bought!—Yes. Will anyone believe the Marchesa would have given her niece to you otherwise?"

Nobili was pale and silent now. Nera's words had called up long trains of thought, opening out into horrible vistas. There was a dreadful logic about all she said that brought instant conviction with it. All the blood within him seemed whirling in his brain.

"But Nera, how can I—in honour—break this marriage?" he urged.

"Break it——well, by going away. No one can force you to marry a girl who allowed herself to be hawked about here and there—offered to Montalto, and refused—to others probably."

"She may not have known it," said Nobili, roused by her bitter words.

"Oh, folly! Why come to me, Count Nobili? You are still in love with her."

At these words Nobili rose and approached Nera. Something in her expression checked him; he drew back. With all her allurements there was a gulf between them Nobili dared not pass.

"Oh, Nera! do not drive me mad! Help me, or banish me."

"I am helping you," she replied, with what seemed passionate earnestness. "Have you seen the sonnet?"

"No."

"If you mean to marry her do not. Take my advice. My mother has seen it," Nera added, with well simulated horror. "She would not let me read it."

Now this was the sheerest malice. Madame Boccarini had never seen the sonnet. But if she had, there was not one word in the sonnet that might not have been addressed to the Blessed Virgin herself.

"No, I will not see the sonnet," said Nobili firmly. "Not that I will marry her, but because I do not choose to see the woman I loved befouled. If it is what you say—and I believe you implicitly—let it lie like other dirt—I will not stir it."

"A generous fellow!" thought Nera. "How I could have loved him! But not now—not now."

"You have been the object of a base fraud,"

continued Nera. Nera would follow to the end artistically. Not leave her work half done.

"She has deceived me. I know she has deceived me," cried Nobili with a pang he could not hide. "She has deceived me, and I loved her!"

His voice sounded like the cry of a hunted animal.

Nera did not like this. Her work was not complete. Nobili's obstinate clinging to Enrica chafed her.

"Did Enrica ever speak to you of her engagement to Count Montalto?" she asked. She grew impatient, and must probe the wound.

"Never," he answered, shrinking back.

"Heavens! What falseness! Why she has passed days and days alone with him."

"No, not alone," interrupted Nobili, stung with a sense of his own shame.

"Oh, you excuse her!" Nera laughed bitterly. "Poor Count, believe me. I tell you what others conceal."

Nobili shuddered. His face grew black as night.

"Do not see that sonnet if you persist in marriage. If not, your course is clear,—fly. If Enrica Guinigi has the smallest sense of decency she cannot urge the marriage."

And Nobili heard this in silence! Oh, shame, and weakness and passion of hot blood—and women's eyes and cruel, bitter tongues—and jealousy, maddening jealousy,—hideous, formless, vague—reaching he knew not whither—Oh shame!

"Write to her, and say you have discovered that she was in league with her aunt, and had other lovers. Everyone knows it."

"But, Nera, if I do, will you comfort me? I shall need it." Nobili opened both his arms. His eyes clung wildly to hers. She was his only hope.

Nera did not move; only she turned her head away to hide her face from him. She dared not let Nobili move her. Poor Nobili!—She could have loved him dearly!

Seeing her thus, Nobili's arms dropped to his side hopelessly; a wan look came over his face.

"Forgive me,—oh, forgive me, Nera! I offer you a broken heart—have pity on me! Say—can you love me, Nera? Only a little. Speak—tell me!"

Nobili was on his knees before her. Every feature of his bright young face formed into an agony of entreaty.

There was a flash of triumph in Nera's black eyes as she bent them on Nobili that chilled him to the soul. Kneeling before her, he feels it. He doubts

her love—doubts all. She has wrought upon him until he is desperate.

"Rise, dear Nobili," Nera whispered softly, touching his lips with hers, but so slightly. "To-morrow—come again to-morrow. I can say nothing now." Her manner was constrained. She spoke in little sentences. "It is late. Supper is ready. My mother waiting. To-morrow."—She pressed the hand he had laid imploringly upon her knee. She touched the curls upon his brow with her light finger-tips; but those fixed despairing eyes beneath she dared not meet.

"Not one word," urged Nobili, in a faltering voice. "Send me away without one word of hope? I shall struggle with horrible thoughts all night. Oh! Nera, speak one word—but one!" He clasped her hands, and looked up into her face. He dared do no more. "Love me a little, Nera," he pleaded, and he laid her warm full hand upon his throbbing heart.

Nera trembled. She rose hastily from her chair, and raised Nobili up also.

"I—I—" she hesitated and avoided his passionate glance—"I have done what I could. I have given you good advice. To-morrow I will tell you more about myself."

"To-morrow, Nera!—Why not to-night?"

Spite of himself Nobili was shocked at her reserve. She was so self-possessed. He had flung his all upon the die.

"You have advised me," he answered, stung by her coldness. "You have convinced me. I shall obey you. Now I must go unless you bid me stay."

Again his eyes pleaded with hers; again found no response. Nera held out her hand to him.

"To-morrow," the full, ripe lips uttered—"To-morrow."

Seeing that he hesitated, Nera pointed with a gesture towards the door. And Nobili departed.

When the door had closed, and the sound of his retreating footsteps along the empty rooms had ceased, Nera raised her hand, then let it fall heavily upon the table.

"I have done it!" she exclaimed, triumphantly. "Now I can bear to think of that Orsini ball. Poor Nobili! if he had spoken then! But he did not. It is his own fault."

After standing a minute or two thinking, Nera uncovered the lamp. Then she took it up in both her hands, stepped to a mirror that hung near, and, turning the light hither and thither, looked at her blooming face, in full and in profile. Then she

replaced the lamp upon the table, yawned, and left the room.

Next morning a note was put into Count Nobili's hand at breakfast. It bore the Boccarini arms and the initials of the Marchesa. The contents were these:—

"MOST ESTEEMED COUNT,

"As a friend of our family, I have the honour of informing you that the marriage of my dear daughter Nera with Prince Farnese is arranged, and will take place in a week. I hope you will be present. I have the honour to assure you of my most sincere and distinguished sentiments,

"MARCHESA AGNESE BOCCARINI."

In the night train from Lucca that evening, Count Nobili was seated. "He was about to travel," he had informed his household. "Later he would send them his address." Before he left, he wrote a letter to Enrica, and sent it to Corellia.

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

Waiting and Longing.

It was the morning of the fourth day since Count Nobili had left Corellia. All had been very quiet about the house. The Marchesa herself took little heed of anything. She sat much in her own room. She was silent and pre-occupied; but she was not displeased. The one dominant passion of her soul—the triumph of the Guinigi name—was now attained. Now she could bear to think of the grand old palace at Lucca, the seigneurial throne, the nuptial chamber; now she could gaze in peace on the countenance of the great Castruccio. No spoiler would dare to tread these sacred floors. No irreverent hand would presume to handle her ancestral treasures; no vulgar eye would rest on the effigies of her race gathered on these walls. All would now be safe—safe under the protection of wealth, enormous wealth—wealth to guard, to preserve, to possess.

Enrica had been the agent by which all this had been effected, therefore she regarded Enrica at this

time with more consideration than she had ever done before. As to any real sentiments of affection, the Marchesa was incapable of them—a cold, hard woman from her youth, now vindictive, as well as cold.

The day after the signing of the contract she called Enrica to her. Enrica trod lightly across the stuccoed floor to where her aunt was standing; then she stopped and waited for her to address her. The Marchesa took Enrica's hand within her own for some minutes, and silently stroked each rosy finger.

"My child Enrica—are you content?" This question was accompanied by an inquiring look, as if she would read Enrica through and through. A sweet smile of ineffable happiness stole over Enrica's soft face. The Marchesa, still holding her hand, uttered something which might almost be called a sigh. "I hope this will last, else—" She broke off abruptly.

Enrica, resenting the implied doubt, disengaged her hand, and drew back from her. The Marchesa, not appearing to observe this, continued—

"I had other views for you, Enrica; but, before you knew anything, you chose a husband for yourself. What do you know about a husband? It is a bad choice."

Again Enrica drew back still further from her aunt, and lifted up her head as if in remonstrance. But the Marchesa was not to be stopped.

"I hate Count Nobili!" she burst out. "I have had my eye upon him ever since he came to Lucca. I know him—you do not. It is possible he may change, but if he does not——"

For the second time the Marchesa did not finish the sentence.

"And do you think he loves you?"

As she asked this question she seated herself, and contemplated Enrica with a cynical smile.

"Yes, he loves me. It is you who do not know him!" exclaimed Enrica. "He is so good, so generous, so true; there is no one in the world like him."

How pure Enrica looked, pleading for her lover! —her face thrown out in sharp profile against the dark wall; her short upper lip raised by her eager speech; the dazzling fairness of her complexion; and her soft hair hanging loose about her head and neck.

"I think I do—I think I know him better than you do," the Marchesa answered somewhat absently.

She was struck by Enrica's exceeding beauty, which seemed within the last few days to have suddenly developed and matured.

"The young man appreciates you too, I do not doubt. I am told he is a lover of Beauty."

This was added with a sneer. Enrica grew crimson.

"Well, well," the Marchesa went on to say, "It is too late now—the thing is done. But remember I have warned you. You chose Count Nobili, not I. Enrica, I have done my duty to you and to my own name. Now go and tell the Cavaliere I want him."

The Marchesa was always wanting the Cavaliere; she was closeted with him for hours at a time. These conferences all ended in one conclusion—that she was irretrievably ruined. No one knew this better than the Marchesa herself; but her haughty reluctance either to accept Count Nobili's money, or to give up Enrica, was the cause of unknown distress to Trenta.

Meanwhile the prospect of the wedding had stirred up everyone in the house to a sort of aimless activity. Adamo strode about, his sad, lazy eyes gazing nowhere in particular. Adamo affected to work hard, but in reality he did nothing but sweep the leaves away from the border of the fountain, and remove the *débris* caused by the fire. Then he would go down and feed the dogs, who, when at home, lived in a sort of cave cut out of

the cliff under the tower—Argo the long-haired mastiff, and Tootsey the rat-terrier, and Juno the lurcher, and the useless bull-dog, who grinned horribly—Adamo fed them, then let them out to run at will over the flowers, while he went to his midday meal.

Adamo had no soul for flowers, or he could not have done this—he could not have seen a bright, many-eyed balsam, or an amber-leaved zinnia with tufted yellow breast, die miserably on their earthy beds, trampled under the dogs' feet. Even the Marchesa, who concerned herself so little with such things, had often chidden him for his carelessness; but Adamo had a way of his own, and by that way he abided, slowly returning to it, spite of argument or remonstrance.

"Domine Dio orders the weather, not I," Adamo said in a grunt to Pipa when his mistress had specially upbraided him for not watering the lemon-trees ranged along the terraces. "Am I expected to give holy oil to the plants as Fra Pacifico does to the sick? Chè! chè!—What will be will be!"

So Adamo went to his dinner in all peace; and Argo and his friends knocked down the flowers, and scratched deep holes in the gravel, barking wildly all the time.

The Marchesa sitting in grave confabulation

with Cavaliere Trenta, rubbed her white hands as she listened.

There was neither portcullis, nor moat, nor drawbridge to her feudal stronghold at Corellia, but there was big, white Argo. Argo alone would pin anyone to the earth.

"Let out the dogs, Adamo," the Marchesa would say. "I like to hear them. They are my soldiers —they defend me."

"Yes, Padrona," Adamo would reply, stolidly. "Surely the Signora Marchesa wants no other. Argo has the sense of a man when I discourse to him."

So Argo barked and yelped, and tore up and down undisturbed, followed by the pack in full chase after imaginary enemies. Woe betide the calves of any stranger arriving at that period of the day at the Villa! They might feel Argo's glistening teeth meeting in them, or be hurled on the ground, —for Argo had a nasty trick of clutching stealthily from behind. Woe betide all but Fra Pacifico, who had so often licked him in drawn battles, when the dog had leaped upon him, that now Argo fled at sight of his priestly garments with a howl.

Adamo, who after his midday meal required tobacco and repose, would not move to save anyone's soul, much less his body.

"Argo is a lunatic without me," he would ob-

serve blandly to Pipa, if roused by a special outburst of barking, the smoke of his pipe curling round his bullet head the while—"Lunatics, either among men or beasts, are not worth attending to. A sweating horse—a crying woman—and a yelping cur—heed not."

Adamo added many more grave remarks between the puffs of his pipe, turning to Pipa, who sat beside him, distaff in hand, the silver pins stuck into her glossy plaits glistening in the sun.

When Adamo ceased he nodded his head like an oracle that had spoken, and dozed,—leaning against the wall, until the sun had sunk to rest into a bed of orange and saffron, and the air was cooled by evening dews. Not till then did Adamo rise up to work.

Pipa, who next to Adamo and the Marchesa, loved Enrica with all the strength of her warm heart, sings all day those unwritten songs of Tuscany that rise and fall with such spontaneous cadence among the vineyards, and in the olive-grounds, that they seem bred in the air—Pipa sings all day for gladness that the Signorina is going to marry a rich and handsome gentleman. Marriage, to Pipa's simple mind—especially marriage with money—must bring certain blessings, and crowds of children; she would as soon doubt the seven wounds

of the Madonna as doubt this. Pipa has seen Count Nobili. She approves of him. His curly auburn hair so short and crisp; his bold look and gracious smile—not to speak of certain notes he slipped into her hand—have quite conquered her. Besides, had Count Nobili not come down—the noble gentleman—like San Michele, with golden wings behind him, and a terrible lance in his hand, as set forth in a dingy fresco in the church at Corellia?—Come down and rescued the dear Signorina when—oh, horrible!—she had been forgotten in the burning tower?

Pipa's joy develops itself in a vain endeavour to clean the entire Villa. With characteristic discernment, she has begun her labours in the upper story, which, being unfurnished, no one ever enters. Pipa has set open all the windows, and thrown back all the blinds; Pipa sweeps and sprinkles, and sweeps again, combatting with dust and fleas and insects innumerable, grown bold by a quiet tenancy of nearly fifty years. While she sweeps Pipa sings:

"I'll build a house round, round, quite round,
For us to live at ease, all three;
Father and mother there shall dwell,
And my true love with me."

Poor Pipa! It is so pleasant to hear her clear voice carolling overhead like a bird from the open

window, and to see her bright face looking out now and then, her gold ear-rings bobbing to and fro—her black rippling hair, and her merry eyes blinded with dust and flue—to swallow a breath of air. Adamo does not work, but Pipa does. If she goes on like this, Pipa may hope to clean the entire floor in a month; of the great Sala below, and the other rooms where people live, Pipa does not think. It is not her way to think; she lives by happy rosy instinct.

Pipa chatters much to Enrica about Count Nobili and her marriage when she is not sweeping or spinning. Enrica continually catches sight of her staring at her with open mouth and curious eyes, her head a little on one side the better to observe her.

"Sweet innocent! she knows nothing that is coming on her," Pipa is thinking; and then Pipa winks, and laughs outright—laughs to the empty walls, which echo the laugh back with a hollow sound.

But if anything lurks there that mocks Pipa's mirth, it is not visible to Pipa's outward eye, so she continues addressing herself to Enrica, who is utterly bewildered by her strange ways.

Pipa cannot bear to think that Enrica never dressed for her betrothed. "Poverina," she says to her, "not dress—not dress! What degradation!

Why, when the Gobbina—a little starved hump-backed bastard—married the blind beggar Gianni at Corellia, for the sake of the pence he got sitting all day shaking his box by the café,—even the Gobbina had a white dress and a wreath—and you, beloved lady, not so much as to care to change your clothes! What must the Signor Conte have thought? Misera mia! We must all seem Pagans to him!" And Pipa's heart smote her sorely, remembering the notes. "Caro Gesù! When you are to be married we must find you something to wear. To be sure, the Marchesa's luggage was chiefly burnt in the fire, but one box is left. Out of that box something will come," Pipa feels sure (miracles are nothing to Pipa, who believes in Pilgrimages and the Evil Eye), she feels sure that it will be so. After much talk with Enrica, who only answers her with a smile, and says absently, looking at the mountains which she does not see——

"Dear Pipa, we will look in the box as you say."

"But when, Signorina?" insists Pipa, and she kisses Enrica's hand, and strokes her dress. "But when?"

"To-morrow," says Enrica, absently. "To-morrow, dear Pipa, not to-day."

"Holy mother!" is Pipa's reply, "It has been

'to-morrow' for four days. Always to-morrow," mutters Pipa to herself, as she makes the dust fly with her broom; "And the Signor Conte is to return in a week! Always to-morrow. What can I do? Such a disgrace was never known. No bridal dress. No veil. The Signorina is too young to understand such things, and the Marchesa is not like other ladies or one might venture to speak to her about it. She would only give me 'accidenti' if I did, and that is so unlucky. To-morrow I must make the Signorina search that box. There will be a white dress and a veil. I dreamt so. Good dreams come from heaven. I have had a candle lighted for luck before the Santissima in the market-place, and fresh flowers put into the pots. There will be sure to be a white dress and a veil—the Saints will send them to the Signorina."

Pipa sweeps and sings. Her children, Angelo and Gigi, are roasting chestnuts under the window outside.

This time she sings a nursery rhyme.—

"Little Trot, that trots so gaily,
And without legs can walk so bravely.
Trottolin! Trottolino!—
Via! via!"

Pipa, in her motherly heart looking out, blesses little Gigi—a chubby child blackened by the sun—

to see him sitting so meek and good beside his brother. Angelo is a naughty boy. Pipa does not love him so well as Gigi. Perhaps this is the reason Angelo is so ill-furnished in point of clothes. His patched and ragged trousers are hitched on with a piece of string. Shirt he has none; only a little dingy waistcoat buttoned over his chest, on which lies a silver medal of the Madonna. Angelo's arms are bare, his face mahogany colour. His head a hopeless tangle of colourless hair. But Angelo has a pair of eyes that dance, and a broad red-lipped mouth, out of which two rows of white teeth shine like pearls. Angelo has just burnt his fingers picking a chestnut out of the ashes. He turns very red, but he is too proud to cry. Angelo's hands and feet are so hard he does not feel the pointed rocks that break the turf in the forest, nor does he fear the young snakes, as plenty as lizards, in the warm nooks. All yesterday Angelo had run up and down to look for chestnuts on his naked feet. He dared not mount into the trees, for that would be stealing; but he leapt, and skipt, and slid when a russet-coated chestnut caught his eye. Gigi was with him, trusted to his care by Pipa, with many objurgations and terrible threats of future punishment should he ill-use him.

Ah! if Pipa knew!—If Pipa had only seen little

Gigi lonely in the woods, and heard his roars for help! Angelo, having found Gigi troublesome, had tied him by a twisted cord of grass to the trunk of an ancient chestnut. Gigi was trepanned into this thraldom by a heap of flowers artful Angelo had brought him—purple crocuses and cyclamens, and Canterbury bells, and gaudy pea-stalks, all thrown before the child. Gigi in his little torn petticoat, had swallowed the bait, and flung himself upon the bright blossoms, grasping them in his dirty fingers. Presently the delighted babe turned his eyes upon cunning Angelo standing behind him, showing his white teeth. Satisfied that Angelo was there Gigi buried himself among the flowers. He crowed to them in his baby way, and flung them here and there. Gigi would run and catch them, too; but suddenly he felt something which stopped him. It was a grass cord which Angelo had secretly woven standing behind Gigi,—then had made it fast round Gigi's waist and knotted it to a tree. A cloud came over Gigi's jolly little face — a momentary cloud—when he found he could not run after the flowers. But it soon passed away, and he squatted down upon the grass (the inveigled child), and again clutched the tempting blossoms. Then his little eyes peered round for Angelo to play with him. Alas!—Angelo was gone!

Gigi sobbed a little to himself silently, but the treacherous flowers had still power to console him —at least, he could tear them to pieces. But by-and-by when the sun mounted high over the tops of the forest-clad mountains, and poured down its burning rays, swallowing up all the shade and glittering like flame on every leaf,—Gigi grew hot and weary. He was very empty, too; it was just the time that Pipa fed him. His stomach craved for food. He craved for Pipa, too—for home—for the soft pressure of Pipa's ample bosom, where he lay so snug.

Gigi looked round. He did not sob now, but set up a hideous roar, the big tears coursing down his fat cheeks, marking their course by furrows in the dirt and grime. The wood echoed to Gigi's roars. He roared for Mammy, for Daddy—(Angelo Gigi cannot say—it is too long a word).—He kicked away the flowers with his pretty dimpled feet—the false flowers, that had betrayed him. The babe cannot reason, but instinct tells him that those painted leaves have wronged him. They are faded now, and lie soiled and crumpled, the ghosts of what they were. Again Gigi tried to rise and run, but he is drawn roughly down by the grass rope. He tries to tear it asunder—in vain; Angelo had taken care of that. At last, hoarse and weary, Gigi sub-

sided into terrible sobs, that heave his little breast. Sobbing thus, with pouting lips and heavy eyes, he waits his fate.

It comes with Angelo! Angelo, leaping downwards through the chequered glades, his pockets stuffed with chestnuts. Like an angel with healing in his wings,—Angelo comes to Gigi. When he spies him out, Gigi rises, unsteady on his little feet —rises up forgetting all—and claps his hands. When Angelo comes near, and stands beside him, Gigi flings his chubby arms about his neck, and nestles to him.

Angelo, when he sees Gigi's disfigured face and sodden eyes, feels his conscience prick him. With his pockets full of chestnuts he pities Gigi; he kisses him,—he takes him up, and bears him in his arms quickly towards home. The happy child closes his weary eyes, and falls asleep on Angelo's shoulder. Pipa, when she sees Angelo return—so careful of his little brother—praises him, and gives him a new-baked cake. Gigi can tell no tales, and Angelo is silent.

While Pipa sweeps and sings, Angelo and Gigi are roasting these very chestnuts on a heap of ashes under the window outside. Enrica sat near them—a little apart—on a low wall, that bordered the summit of the cliff. The zone of mighty moun-

tains rose sharp and clear before her. It seemed to her as if she had only to stretch out her hand to touch them. The morning lights rested on them with a fresh glory; the crisp air, laden with a scent of herbs, came circling round, and stirred the curls upon her pretty head. Enrica wore the same quaintly-cut dress, that swept upon the ground, as when Nobili was there. She had no other. All had been burnt in the fire. Sitting there, she plucked the moss that grew upon the wall, and watched it as it dropped into the abyss. This was shrouded in deepest shadow. The rush of the distant river in the valley below was audible. Enrica raised her head and listened. That river flowed round the walls of Lucca. Nobili was there. Happy river!—Oh! that it would bear her to him on its frothy current!—Surely her life-path lay straight before her now!—Straight into Paradise! Not a stone is on that path;—not a rise, not a fall.

"In a week I will return," Nobili had said—In a week. And his eyes had rested upon her as he spoke the words in a mist of love. Enrica's face was pale and almost stern, and her blue eyes had strange lights and shadows in them. How came it that, since he had left her, the world had grown so old and grey? That all the impulse of her nature, the quick ebb and flow of youth and hope, was

stilled and faded out, and all her thoughts absorbed into a dreadful longing? She could not tell; nor could she tell what ailed her; but she felt that she was changed. She tried to listen to the prattle of the two children, to Pipa singing above.

"Come out! come out!
Never despair!
Father and mother and sweetheart,
All will be there!"

Enrica could not listen. It was the dark abyss below that drew her towards its silent bosom. She hung over the wall, her eyes measuring its depths. What ailed her? Was she smitten mad by the wild tumult of joy that had swept over her as she stood hand-in-hand with Nobili? Or was she on the eve of some crisis?—A crisis of life and death? Oh! why had Nobili left her?—When would he return? She could not tell. All she knew was that in the streaming sunlight of this wondrous morning, when earth and heaven were as fair as on the first creation day,—without him all was dark, sad, and dreary.

CHAPTER II.

A Storm at the Villa.

A FOOTSTEP was heard upon the gravel. The dogs shut up in the cave scratched furiously, then barked loudly. Following the footsteps a bareheaded peasant appeared, his red shirt open, showing his sunburnt chest. He ran up to the open door, a letter in his hand. Seeing Enrica sitting on the low wall, he stopped and made her a rustic bow.

"Who are you?" Enrica asked, her heart beating wildly.

"Illustrissima," and the man bowed again, "I am Giacomo. Giacomo protected by his reverence Fra Pacifico. You have heard of Giacomo?"

Enrica shook her head impatiently.

"Surely you are the Signorina Enrica?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then this letter is for you." And Giacomo stepped up and gave it into her outstretched hand. "I was to tell the Illustrissima that the letter had come express from Lucca to Fra Pacifico. Fra Pacifico could not bring it down himself, because

the wife of the baker Pietro is ill, and he is nursing her."

Enrica took the letter, then stared at Giacomo so fixedly, before he turned to go, it haunted him many days after, for fear the Signorina had given him the Evil Eye.

Enrica held the letter in her hand. She gazed at it (standing on the spot where she had taken it, midway between the door and the low wall, a glint of sunshine striking upon her hair turning it to threads of gold)—in silent ecstasy. It was Nobili's first letter to her. His name was in the corner, his monogram on the seal. The letter came to her in her loneliness like Nobili's visible presence. Ah! who does not recall the rapture of a first love-letter! —The tangible assurance it brings that our lover is still our own—the hungry eye that runs over every line traced by that dear hand—the oft-repeated words his voice has spoken stamped on the page—the hidden sense—the half-dropped sentences—all echoing within us as note to note in chords of music!

Enrica's eyes wandered over the address, "To the Noble Signorina Enrica Guinigi, Corellia,"—as if each word had been some wonder. She dwelt upon every crooked line and twist, each tail and flourish that Nobili's hand had traced. She pressed

the letter to her lips, then laid it upon her lap and gazed at it, ekeing out every second of suspense to its utmost limit. Suddenly a burning curiosity possessed her to know when he would come. With a gasp that almost stopped her breath she tore the cover open. The paper shook so violently in her unsteady hand that the lines seemed to run up and down and dance. She could distinguish nothing.—She pressed her hand to her forehead, steadied herself, then read:—

"ENRICA,

"When this comes to you I am gone from you for ever. You have betrayed me—how much I do not care to know. Perhaps I think you less guilty than you are. Of all women my heart clung to you. I loved you as men only love once in their lives. For the sake of that love, I will still screen you all I can. But it is known in Lucca that Count Montalto was your accepted lover when you promised yourself to me. Also, that Count Montalto refused to marry you when you were offered by the Marchesa Guinigi. From this knowledge I cannot screen you. God is my witness I go, not desiring by my presence or my words to reproach you further. But as a man who prizes the honour of his house and home, I cannot marry you. Tell the

Marchesa I shall keep my word to her, although I break the marriage contract. She will find the money placed as she desired.

"MARIO NOBILI.

"Palazzo Nobili, Lucca."

Little by little Enrica read the whole, sentence by sentence. At first the full horror of the words was veiled. They came to her in a dazed stupid way. A mist gathered about her. There was a buzzing in her ears that deadened her brain. She forced herself to read over the letter again. Then her heart stood still with terror,—her cheeks burned, —her head reeled. A deadly cold came over her. Of all within that letter she understood nothing but the words, "I am gone from you for ever." Gone! —Nobili gone! Never to speak to her again in that sweet voice!—Never to press his lips to hers!— Never to gather her to him in those firm strong arms! O God! then she must die.—If Nobili were gone, she must die! A terrible pang shot through her; then a great calmness came over her, and she was very still. "Die!—Yes,—why not?— Die!"

Clutching the letter in her icy hand, Enrica looked round with pale, tremulous eyes, from which the light has faded. It could not be the same world

of an hour ago. Death had come into it,—she is about to die. Yet the sun shone fiercely upon her face as she turned it upwards and struck upon her eyes. The children laughed over the chestnuts spluttering in the ashes. Pipa sang merrily above at the open window. A bird—was it a raven?—poised itself in the air; the cattle grazed peacefully on the green slopes of the opposite mountain, and a drove of pigs ran downwards to drink at a little pool. She alone has changed.

A dull, dim consciousness drew her forward towards the low wall and the abyss that yawned beneath. There she should lie at peace.—There the stillness would quiet her heart that beat so hard against her side—surely her heart must burst! She had a dumb instinct that she should like to sleep; she was so weary. Stronger grew the passion of her longing to cast herself on that cold bed—deep deep below,—to rest for ever. She tried to move, but could not. She tottered and almost fell. Then all swam before her. She sank backwards against the door; with her two hands she clutched the post. Her white face was set. But in her agony not a sound escaped her. Her secret—Nobili's secret—must be kept, she told herself. No one must ever know that Nobili had left her—that she was about to die—No one, No one!

With a last effort she tried to rush forward to take that leap below which would end all. In vain. All nature rushed in a wild whirlwind around her! A deadly sickness seized her. Her eyes closed. She dropped beside the door a little ruffled heap upon the ground, Nobili's letter clasped tightly in her hand.

"My love he is to Lucca gone
To Lucca fair, a lord to be,
And I would fain a message send,
But who will tell my tale for me?"

sang out Pipa from above.

"All the folk say that I am brown;
The earth is brown, yet gives good corn;
The clove-pink, too, although 'tis brown,
In hands of gentlefolk is borne.

They say my love is brown; but he
Shines like an angel form to me;
They say my love is dark as night,
To me he seems an angel bright!"

Not hearing the children's voices, and fearing some trick of naughty Angelo against the peace of her precious Gigi, Pipa leant out over the window-sill. "My babe, my babe, where art thou?" was on her lips to cry; instead Pipa gave a piercing scream. It broke the midday silence. Argo barked loudly.

"Dio Gesù!" Pipa cried wildly out—"The Signorina—she is dead! Help!—Help!"

CHAPTER III.

Between Life and Death.

MANY hours had passed. Enrica lay still unconscious upon her bed, her face framed in her golden hair, her blue eyes open, her limbs stiff, her body cold. Sometimes her lips parted, and a smile rippled over her face; then she shuddered, and drew herself as it were together. All this time Nobili's letter was within her hand; her fingers tightened over it with a convulsive grasp.

Pipa and the Cavaliere were with her. They had done all they could to revive her, but without effect. Trenta, sitting there, his hands crossed upon his knees, his eyes fixed upon Enrica, looked suddenly aged. How all this had come about he could not even guess. He had heard Pipa's screams, and so had the Marchesa, and he had come, and he and Pipa together had raised her up and placed her on her bed; and the Marchesa had charged him to watch her, and let her know when she came to her senses. Neither the Cavaliere nor Pipa knew that Enrica had had a letter from Nobili. Pipa noticed a paper in her hand, but did not know what

it was. The Signorina had been struck down in a fit, was Pipa's explanation. It was very terrible, but God or the devil—she could not tell which—did send fits. They must be borne. An end would come. She had done all she could. Seeing no present change Trenta rose to go to the Marchesa. His joints were so stiff he could not move at all without his stick, and the furrows which had deepened upon his face were moistened with tears.

"Is Enrica no better?" the Marchesa asked him, in a voice she tried to steady, but could not. She trembled all over.

"Enrica is no better," he answered.

"Will she die?" the Marchesa asked again.

"Who can tell? She is in the hands of God."

As he spoke, Trenta shot an angry scowl at his friend—he knew her so well. If Enrica died the Guinigi race was doomed—that made her tremble, not affection for Enrica. A word more from the Marchesa, and Trenta would have told her this to her face.

"We are all in the hands of God," the Marchesa repeated solemnly and crossed herself. "I believe little in doctors."

"Still," said Trenta, "if there is no change, it is our duty to send for one. Is there any doctor at Corellia?"

"None nearer than Lucca," she replied. "Send for Fra Pacifico. If he thinks it of any use, a man shall be despatched to Lucca immediately."

"Surely you will let Count Nobili know the danger Enrica is in?"

"No, no!" cried the Marchesa, fiercely. "Count Nobili comes back here to marry Enrica or not at all. I will not have him on any other terms. If the child dies he will not come. That at least will be a gain."

Even on the brink of death and ruin she could think of this!

"Enrica will not die!—she will not die!" sobbed the poor old Cavaliere, breaking down all at once. He sank upon a chair and covered his face.

The Marchesa rose and placed her hand upon his shoulder. Her heart was bleeding too, but from another cause. She bore her wounds in silence. To complain was not in the Marchesa's nature. It would have increased her suffering rather than have relieved it. Still she pitied her old friend, although no word expressed it; nothing but the pressure of her hand resting upon his shoulder. Trenta's sobs were the only sound that broke the silence.

"This is losing time," she said. "Send at once

for Fra Pacifico. Until he comes, we know nothing."

When Fra Pacifico's rugged mountainous figure entered Enrica's room, he seemed to fill it. First, he blessed the sweet girl lying before him with such a terrible mockery of life in her widely-opened eyes. His deep voice shook and his grave face twitched as he pronounced the "Beatus." Leaning over the bed, Fra Pacifico proceeded to examine her in silence. He uncovered her feet and felt her heart, her hands, her forehead, lifting up the shining curls as he did so with a tender touch, and laying them out upon the pillow, as reverently as he would replace a relic.

Cavaliere Trenta stood beside him in breathless silence. Was it life or death? Looking into Fra Pacifico's motionless face none could tell. Pipa was kneeling in a corner, running her rosary between her fingers; she was listening also, with mouth and eyes wide open.

"Her pulse still beats," Fra Pacifico said at last, betraying no outward emotion,—"It beats, but very feebly. There is a little warmth about her heart."

"San Ricardo be thanked!" ejaculated Trenta, clasping his hands.

With the mention of his ancestral saint, the

Cavaliere's thoughts ran on to the Trenta chapel in the church of San Frediano, where they had all stood so lately together, Enrica blooming in health and beauty at his side.—His sobs choked his voice.

"Shall I send to Lucca for a doctor?" Trenta asked, as soon as he could compose himself.

"As you please. Her condition is very precarious; nothing can be done, however, but to keep her warm. That I see has been attended to. She could swallow nothing, therefore no doctor could help her. With such a pulse, to bleed her would be madness. Her youth may save her. It is plain to me some shock or horror must have struck her down and paralysed the vital powers. How could this have been?"

The priest stood over her, lost in thought, his bushy eyebrows knit; then he turned to Pipa.

"Has anything happened, Pipa," he asked, "to account for this?"

"Nothing, your reverence," she answered. "I saw the Signorina, and spoke to her, not ten minutes before I found her lying in the doorway."

"Had anyone seen her?"

"No one."

"I sent a letter to her from Count Nobili. Did you see the messenger arrive?"

"No; I was cleaning in the upper story. He might have come and gone, and I not seen him."

"I heard of no letter," put in the bewildered Trenta. "What letter? No one mentioned a letter."

"Possibly," answered Fra Pacifico, in his quiet, impassible way,—"But there was a letter."—He turned again to interrogate Pipa.—"Then the Signorina must have taken the letter herself."—Slightly raising his eyebrows, a sudden light came into his eyes.—"That letter has done this. What can Nobili have said to her? Did you see any letter beside her, Pipa, when she fell?"

Pipa rose up from the corner where she had been kneeling, raised the sheet, and pointed to a paper clasped in Enrica's hand. As she did so, Pipa pressed her warm lips upon the colourless little hand. She would have covered the hand again to keep it warm, but Fra Pacifico stopped her.

"We must see that letter; it is absolutely needful—I her confessor, and you, Cavaliere, Enrica's best friend; indeed, her only friend."

At a touch of his strong hand the letter fell from Enrica's fingers, though they clung to it convulsively.

"Of course we must see the letter," the Cavaliere

responded with emphasis, waking up from the apathy of grief into which he had been plunged.

Fra Pacifico, casting a look of unutterable pity on Enrica,—whose secret it seemed sacrilege to violate while she lay helpless before them,—unfolded the letter. He and the Cavaliere, standing on tip-toe at his side, his head hardly reaching the priest's elbow, read it together. When Trenta had finished, an expression of horror and rage came into his face. He threw his arms wildly above his head.

"The villain!" he exclaimed,—"'Gone for ever!'—'You have betrayed me!'—'Cannot marry you!'—'Montalto!'"

Here Trenta stopped, remembering suddenly what had passed between himself and Count Montalto at their interview, which he justly considered as confidential. Trenta's first feeling was one of amazement how Nobili had come to know it. Then he remembered what he had said to Baldassare in the street, to quiet him—"That it was all right, and that Enrica would consent to her aunt's commands, and to his wishes."

"Beast!" he muttered, "this is what I get by associating with one who is no gentleman. I'll punish him!"

A blank terror took possession of the Cavaliere.

He glanced at Enrica so life-like with her fixed, open eyes, and asked himself, if she recovered, would she ever forgive him?

"I did it for the best!" he murmured, shaking his white head. "God knows I did it for the best! —the dear, blessed one!—To give her a home, and a husband, to protect her. I knew nothing about Count Nobili. Why did you not tell me, my sweetest?" he said, leaning over the bed, and addressing Enrica in his bewilderment.

Alas! the glassy blue eyes stared at him fixedly, the white lips were motionless.

The effect of all this on Fra Pacifico had been very different. Under the strongest excitement the long habit of his office had taught him a certain outward composure. He was ignorant of much which was known to the Cavaliere. Fra Pacifico watched his excessive agitation with grave curiosity.

"What does this mean about Count Montalto?" he asked, somewhat sternly. "What has Count Montalto to do with her?"

As he asked this question he stretched his arm authoritatively over Enrica. Protection to the weak was the first thought of the strong man. His great bodily strength had been given him for that purpose, Fra Pacifico always said.

"I offered her in marriage to Count Montalto,"

answered the Cavaliere lifting up his aged head, and meeting the priest's suspicious glance with a look of gentle reproach. "What do you think I could have done but this?"

"And Count Montalto refused her?"

"Yes, he refused her because he was a Communist. Nothing passed between them—nothing. They never met but twice—both times in my presence."

Fra Pacifico was satisfied.

"God be praised!" he muttered to himself.

Still holding the letter in his hand, the priest turned towards Enrica. Again he felt her pulse, and passed his broad hand across her forehead.

"No change!" he said, sadly,—"No change! Poor child, how she must have suffered! And alone too! There is some mistake—obviously some mistake."

"No mistake about the wretch having forsaken her," interrupted Trenta, firing up at what he considered Fra Pacifico's ill-placed leniency. "Domine Dio! No mistake about that."

"Yes, but there must be," insisted the other. "I have known Nobili from a boy. He is incapable of such villainy. I tell you, Cavaliere, Nobili is utterly incapable of it. He has been deceived. By-

and-by he will bitterly repent this;" and Fra Pacifico held up the letter.

"Yes," answered Trenta, bitterly,—"Yes, if she lives. If he has killed her what will his repentance matter?"

"Better wait, however, until we know more. Nobili may be hot-headed, vain, and credulous, but he is generous to a fault. If he cannot justify himself, why, then"—the priest's voice changed, his swarthy face flushed with a dark glow—"I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt—charity demands this—but if Nobili cannot justify himself"—(the Cavaliere made an indignant gesture,)—"leave him to me. You shall be satisfied, Cavaliere. God deals with men's souls hereafter, but he permits bodily punishment in this world. Nobili shall have his, I promise you."

Fra Pacifico clenched his huge fist menacingly, and dealt a blow in the air that would have felled a giant.

Having given vent to his feelings, to the unmitigated delight of the Cavaliere who nodded and smiled—for an instant forgetting his sorrow, and Enrica lying there—Fra Pacifico composed himself.

"The Marchesa must see that letter," he said,

in his usual manner. "Take it to her, Cavaliere. Hear what she says."

The Cavaliere took the letter in silence. Then he shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

"I must go now to Corellia. I will return soon. That Enrica still lives is full of hope," Fra Pacifico said this, turning towards the little bed with its modest shroud of white linen curtains. "But I can do nothing. The feeble spark of life that still lingers in her frame would fly for ever if tormented by remedies. I have hope in God only." And he gave a heavy sigh.

Before Fra Pacifico departed he took some holy water from a little vessel near the bed, and sprinkled it upon Enrica. He ordered Pipa to keep her very warm, and to watch every breath she drew. Then he glided from the room with the light step of one well used to sickness.

Cavaliere Trenta followed him slowly. He paused motionless in the open doorway, his eyes,—from which the tears were streaming, fixed on Enrica—the fatal letter in his hand. At length he tore himself away, closed the door, and crossing the Sala, knocked at the door of the Marchesa's apartment.

* * * * * *

In the grey of the early morning of the second

day, just as the sun rose and cast a few straggling gleams into the room, Enrica called faintly to Pipa. She knew Pipa when she came. It seemed as if Enrica had waked out of a long, deep sleep. She felt no pain, but an excessive weakness. She touched her forehead and her hair. She handled the sheets,—then extended both her hands to Pipa, as if she had been buried and asked to be raised up again. She tried to sit up, but—she fell back upon her pillow. Pipa's arms were round her in an instant. She put back the long hair that fell upon Enrica's face, and poured into her mouth a few drops of a cordial Fra Pacifico had left for her. Pipa dared not speak;—Pipa dared not breathe—so great was her joy. At length she ventured to take one of Enrica's hands in hers, pressed it gently and said to her in a low voice,

"You must be very quiet. We are all here."

Enrica looked up at Pipa, surprised and frightened,—then her eyes wandered round in search of something. She was evidently dwelling upon some idea she could not express. She raised her hand, opened it slowly, and gazed at it. Her hand was empty.

"Where is——?" Enrica asked, in a voice like a sigh—then she stopped, and gazed up again distressfully into Pipa's face.

Pipa knew that Count Nobili's letter had been taken by Fra Pacifico. Now she bent over Enrica in an agony of fear lest, when her reason came and she missed that letter she should sink back again and die.

With the sound of her own voice all came back to Enrica in an instant. She closed her eyes, and longed never to open them again! "Gone! Gone! for ever!" sounded in her ears like a rushing of great waters. Then she lay for a long time quite still. She could not bear to speak to Pipa. His name—Nobili's name—was sacred. If Pipa knew what Nobili had done, she might speak ill of him. That Enrica could not bear. Yet she should like to know who had taken his letter?

Her brain was very weak, yet it worked incessantly. She asked herself all manner of questions in a helpless way; but as her fluttering pulses settled, and the blood returned to its accustomed channels, faintly colouring her cheek, the truth came to her. Insulted!—abandoned!—forgotten! She thought it all over bit by bit. Each thought as it rose in her mind seemed to freeze the returning warmth within her. That letter—oh, if she could only find that letter! She tried to recall every phrase and put a sense to it. How had she

deceived him? What could Nobili mean? What had she done to be talked of in Lucca? Montalto —who was he? At first she was so stunned she forgot his name; then it came to her. Yes, the poet—Montalto—Trenta's friend—who had raved on the Guinigi tower. What was he to her? Marry Montalto! Oh! who could have said it?

Gradually, as Enrica's mind became clearer, lying there so still with no sound but Pipa's measured breathing,—she felt to its full extent how Nobili had wronged her. Why had he not come himself and asked her if all this were true? To leave her thus for ever! Without even asking her —oh! how cruel! She believed in him, why did he not believe in her? No one had ever yet told her a lie; within herself she felt no power of deceit. She could not understand it in others, nor the falseness of the world. Now she must learn it! Then a great longing and tenderness came over her. She loved Nobili still. Even though he had smitten her so sorely, she loved him—she loved him and she forgave him! But stronger and stronger grew the thought, even while these longings swept over her like great waves,—that Nobili was unworthy of her. Should she love him less for that? Oh, no! He was unworthy of her—yet she yearned after him. He had left her,—but in her heart Nobili

should for ever sit enthroned—and she would worship him!

And they had been so happy, so more than happy—from the first moment they had met—and he had shattered it! Oh, his love for her was dead and buried out of sight! What was life to her without Nobili? Oh, those forebodings that had clung about her from the very moment he had left Corellia!—Now she could understand them. Never to see him again!—Was it possible? A great pity came upon her for herself. No one, she was sure could ever have suffered like her—No one,—No one. This thought for some time pursued her closely. There was a terrible comfort in it. Alas! all her life would be suffering now!

As Enrica lay there, her face turned towards the wall, and her eyes closed (Pipa watching her, thinking she had dozed)—suddenly her bosom heaved. She gave a wild cry. The pent-up tears came pouring down her cheeks, and sob after sob shook her from head to foot.

This burst of grief saved her—Fra Pacifico said so when he came down later. "Death had passed very near her," he said, "but now she would recover."

CHAPTER IV.

Fra Pacifico and the Marchesa.

On the evening of that day the Marchesa was in her own room, opening from the Sala. The little furniture the room contained was collected around the Marchesa, forming a species of oasis on the broad desert of the scagliola floor. A brass lamp placed on a table formed the centre of this habitable spot. The Marchesa sat in deep shadow, but in the outline of her tall slight figure, and in the carriage of her head and neck, there was the same indomitable pride, courage, and energy, as before. A paper lay on the ground near her; it was Nobili's letter. Fra Pacifico sat opposite to her. He was speaking. His deep-set luminous eyes were fixed on the Marchesa. His straight, coarse hair was pushed up erect upon his brow; there was at all times something of a mane about it. His cassock sat loosely about his big well-made limbs; his priestly stock was loosed, showing the dark skin of his throat and chin. In the turn of his eye, in the expression of his countenance, there were anxiety, restlessness, and distrust.

"Yes,—Enrica has recovered for the present," he was saying, "but such an attack saps and weakens the very issues of life. Count Nobili, if not brought to reason, would break her heart." She was obstinately silent. The balance of her mind was partially upset. "'I shall never see Nobili again,' was all she would say to me. It is a pity I think, that you sent the Cavaliere away to Lucca. Enrica might have opened her mind to him."

As he spoke Fra Pacifico crossed one of his legs over the other, and arranged the heavy folds of his cassock over his knees.

"And who says Enrica shall not see Nobili again?" asked the Marchesa defiantly. "Holy Saints! That is my affair. I want no advice. My honour is now as much concerned in the completion of this marriage as it was before to prevent it. The contract has been signed in my presence. The money agreed upon has been paid over to me. The marriage must take place. I have sent Trenta to Lucca to make preliminary arrangements."

"I rejoice to hear it," answered Fra Pacifico, his countenance brightening. "There must be some extraordinary mistake. The Cavaliere will explain it. Some enemies of your family must have misled Count Nobili, especially as there was a certain appearance of concealment respecting Count Mont-

alto. It will all come right. I only feared lest the language of that letter would have, in your opinion, rendered the marriage impossible."

"That letter does not move me in the least," answered the Marchesa haughtily, speaking out of the shadow. She gave the letter a kick, sending it farther from her. "I care neither for praise nor insult from such a fellow. He is but an instrument in my hand. He has, however, justified my bad opinion of him. I am glad of that. Do you imagine, my father," she added leaning forward, and bringing her head for an instant within the circle of the light—"Do you imagine anything but absolute necessity would have induced me to allow Count Nobili ever to enter my presence?"

"I am bound to tell you that your pride is un-Christian, my daughter." Fra Pacifico spoke with warmth. "I cannot permit such language in my presence."

The Marchesa waved her hand contemptuously, then contemplated him, a smile upon her face.

"I have long known Count Nobili. He has the faults of his age. He is impulsive,—vain perhaps, —but at the same time he is loyal and generous. He was not himself when he wrote that letter. There is a passionate sorrow about it that convinces me of this. He has been misled. The offer

you sanctioned of Enrica's hand to Count Montalto has been misrepresented to him. Undoubtedly Nobili ought to have sought an explanation before he left Lucca; but the more he loved Enrica, the more he must have suffered before he could so address her."

"You justify Count Nobili then, my father, not only for abandoning my niece, but for endeavouring to blast her character? Is this your Christianity?" The Marchesa asked this question with bitter scorn; her keen eyes shone mockingly out of the darkness. "I told you what he was, remember. I have some knowledge of him and of his father."

"My daughter, I do not defend him. If need be, I have sworn to punish him with my own hand. But, until I know all the circumstances, I pity him —I repeat, I pity him. Some powerful influence must have been brought to bear upon Nobili. It may have been a woman."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Marchesa contemptuously. "You admit then Nobili has a taste for women?"

Fra Pacifico rose suddenly from his chair. An expression of deep displeasure was on his face, which had grown crimson under the Marchesa's taunts.

"I desire no altercation, Marchesa, nor will I permit you to address such unseemly words to me. What I deem fitting I shall say—now and always. It is my duty. You have called me here. What do you want? How can I help you? In all things lawful I am ready to do so. Nay, I will take the whole matter on myself if you desire."

As he spoke, Fra Pacifico stooped and raised Nobili's crumpled letter from the floor. He spread it out open on the table. The Marchesa motioned to him to reseat himself. He did so.

"What I want?" she said, taking up the priest's words, "I will tell you. When I bring Count Nobili here,"—the Marchesa spoke very slowly, and stretched out her long fingers, as though she held him already in her grasp,—"When I bring Count Nobili here, I want you to perform the marriage ceremony. It must take place immediately. Under the circumstances the marriage had better be private."

"I shall not perform the ceremony," answered Fra Pacifico, his full, deep voice ringing through the room,—"at your bidding only. Enrica must also consent. Enrica must consent in my presence."

As the light of the lamp struck upon Fra Pacifico the lines about his mouth deepened, and that look of courage and of command the people of

Corellia knew so well, was marked upon his countenance. A rock might have been moved, but not Fra Pacifico.

"Enrica shall obey me!" cried the Marchesa. Her temper was rising beyond control at the idea of any opposition at such a critical moment. She had made her plan, settled it with Trenta; her plan must be carried out. "Enrica shall obey me," she repeated. "Enrica will obey me unless instigated by you, Fra Pacifico."

"My daughter," replied the priest, "if you forget the respect due to my office I shall leave you."

"Pardon me, my father," and the Marchesa bowed stiffly; "but I appeal to your justice. Can I allow that reprobate to break my niece's heart? To tarnish her good name? If there were a single Guinigi left he would stab Nobili like a dog! Such a fellow is unworthy the name of gentleman. Marriage alone can remove the stain he has cast upon Enrica. It is no question of sentiment. The marriage is essential to the honour of my house. Enrica must be *called* Countess Nobili, whether Nobili pleases it or not—else how can I keep his money? And without his money——" She paused suddenly. In the warmth of speech the Marchesa had been actually led into the confession that Nobili

was necessary to her. "I have the contract," she added—"Thank heaven I have the contract! Nobili is legally bound by the contract."

"Yes, that may be," answered Fra Pacifico reflectively—"if you choose to force him. But I warn you that I will put no violence on Enrica's feelings. She must decide for herself."

"But if Enrica still loves him," urged the Marchesa, determined if possible to avoid an appeal to her niece—"if Enrica still loves him as you assure me she does, may we not look upon her acquiescence as obtained?"

Fra Pacifico shook his head. He was perfectly unmoved by the Marchesa's violence.

"Life, honour, position, reputation—all rest on this marriage. I have accepted Count Nobili's money; Count Nobili must accept my niece."

"Your niece must nevertheless consent. I can permit no other arrangement. Then you have to find Count Nobili. He must voluntarily appear at the altar."

Fra Pacifico turned his resolute face full upon the Marchesa. Her whole attitude betrayed intense excitement.

"Your niece must consent, Count Nobili must appear voluntarily before the altar,—else the Church

cannot sanction the union. It would be sacrilege. How do you propose to overcome Count Nobili's refusal?"

"By the law!" exclaimed the Marchesa, imperiously.

Fra Pacifico turned aside his head to conceal a smile. The law had not hitherto favoured the Marchesa. Her constant appeals to the law had been the principal cause of her present troubles.

"By the law," the Marchesa repeated. Her sallow face glowed for a moment. "Surely, Fra Pacifico—surely you will not oppose me? You talk of the Church—the Church, indeed! Did not the wretch sign the marriage contract in your presence? The Church must enable him to complete his contract—in your presence too, as priest and civil delegate,—and you talk of sacrilege, my father! Chè! Chè! Dio buono!" she exclaimed losing all self-control in the conviction her own argument brought to her—"Fra Pacifico, you must be mad!"

"I only ask for Enrica's consent," answered the priest. "That given, if Count Nobili comes, I will consent to marry them."

"Count Nobili—he shall come—never fear," and the Marchesa gave a short scornful laugh. "After I have been to Lucca he will come. I shall

have done my duty. It is all very well," added the Marchesa loftily, "for low people to pair like animals, from inclination. Such vulgar motives have no place in the world in which I live. Persons of my rank form alliances among themselves from more elevated considerations—from political and prudential motives—for the sake of great wealth when wealth is required—to shed fresh lustre on an historic name by adding to it the splendour of another equally illustrious—My own marriage was arranged for this end. Again I remind you, my father, that nothing but necessity would have forced me to permit a usurer's son to dare to aspire to the hand of my niece. It is a horrible degradation—the first blot on a spotless escutcheon."

"Again I warn you, my daughter, such pride is unseemly. Summon Enrica at once. Let us hear what she says."

The Marchesa drew back into the shadow and was silent. As long as she could bring her battery of arguments against Fra Pacifico she felt safe. What Enrica might say, who could tell? One word from Enrica might overturn all her subtle combinations. That Fra Pacifico should assist her was indispensable. Another priest, less interested in Enrica, might, under the circumstances, refuse to unite them. Even if that difficulty could be got over,

the Marchesa was fully alive to the fact that a painful scene would probably occur. Such a scene as ought not to be witnessed by a stranger. Hence her hesitation in calling Enrica.

During this pause Fra Pacifico crossed his arms upon his breast and waited in silence.

"Let Enrica come," said the Marchesa at last—"I have no objection." She threw herself back on her seat, and doggedly awaited the result.

Fra Pacifico rose and opened a door on the other side of the room, communicating with the vaulted passage which had connected the Villa with the tower.

"Who is there?" he called. (Bells were a luxury unknown at Corellia.)

"I," answered Angelo, running forward, his eyes gleaming like two stars. Angelo sometimes acted as acolyte to Fra Pacifico. Angelo was proud to show his alacrity to his Reverence, who had often cuffed him for his mischievous pranks,—specially on one occasion, when Fra Pacifico had found him in the act of pushing Gigi stealthily into the marble basin of the fountain, to see if, being small, Gigi would swim like the gold fish.

"Go to the Signorina Enrica, Angelo, and tell her that the Marchesa wants her."

As long as Enrica was ill, Fra Pacifico went freely in and out of her room; now that she was recovered, and had risen from her bed, it was not suitable for him to seek her there himself.

CHAPTER V.

To be, or not to be?

WHEN Angelo knocked at Enrica's door, Pipa, who was with her, opened it, and gave her Fra Pacifico's message. The summons was so sudden Enrica had no time to think, but a wild unmeaning delight possessed her. It was so rare for her aunt to send for her she must be going to tell her something about Nobili. With his name upon her lips, Enrica started up from the chair on which she had been half lying, and ran towards the door.

"Softly, softly, my blessed angel!" cried Pipa, following her with outstretched arms as if she were a baby taking its first steps. "You were all but dead this morning, and now you run like little Gigi when I call to him."

"I can walk very well, Pipa." Enrica opened the door with feverish haste. "I must not keep my aunt waiting."

"Let me put a shawl round you," insisted kind Pipa. "The evening is fresh."

She wrapped a large white shawl about her,

that made Enrica look paler and more ghost-like than before.

"Nobody loves me like you, Pipa,—nobody—dear Pipa!"

Enrica threw her soft arms around Pipa as she said this. She felt so lonely the tears came into her eyes already swollen with excessive weeping.

"Who knows?" was Pipa's grave reply. "It is a strange world. You must not judge a man always by what he does."

Enrica gave a deep sigh. She had hurried out of her room into the Sala with a headlong impulse to rush to her aunt. Now she dreaded what her aunt might have to say to her. The little strength she had suddenly left her. The warm blood that had mounted to her head chilled within her veins. For a few moments she leaned against Pipa, who watched her with anxious eyes. Then disengaging herself from her, she trod feebly across the floor. The Sala was in darkness. Enrica stretched out her hands before her to feel for the door. When she had found it she stopped terrified. What was she about to hear? The deep voice of Fra Pacifico was audible from within. Enrica placed her hand upon the handle of the door,—then she withdrew it. Without the Autumn wind moaned round the corners of the house. How it must roar in the

abyss under tne cliffs, Enrica thought. How dark it must be down there in the blackness of the night! Like letters written in fire Nobili's words rose up before her—"I am gone from you for ever!" Oh! why was she not dead?—Why was she not lying deep below, buried among the cold rocks?—Enrica felt very faint. A groan escaped her.

Fra Pacifico, accustomed to listen to the almost inaudible sounds of the sick and the dying, heard it.

The door opened. Enrica found herself within the room.

"Enrica," said the Marchesa, addressing her blandly (did not all now depend upon her?)—"Enrica you look very pale."

She made no reply, but looked round vacantly. The light of the lamp coming suddenly out of the darkness—the finding herself face to face with the Marchesa—dazzled and alarmed her.

Fra Pacifico took both Enrica's hands in his, drew an armchair forward, and placed her in it.

"Enrica, I have sent for you to ask you a question." The Marchesa spoke.

At the sound of her aunt's voice, Enrica shuddered visibly. Was it not after all the Marchesa's fault that Nobili had left her? Why had the Marchesa thrown her into Count Montalto's company? Why had the Marchesa offered her in marriage to

Count Montalto without telling her? At this moment Enrica loathed her. Something of all this passed over her pallid face as she turned her eyes beseechingly towards Fra Pacifico. The Marchesa watched her with secret rage.

Was this silly, love-sick child about to annihilate the labours of her life? Was this daughter of her husband's cousin Antonio—a collateral branch—about to consign the Guinigi name to the tombs? She could have lifted up her voice and cursed her where she stood.

"Enrica, I have sent for you to ask you a question." Spite of her efforts to be calm, there was a strange ring in her voice that made Enrica look up at her. "Enrica, do you still love Count Nobili?"

"This is not a fair question," interrupted Fra Pacifico, coming to the rescue of the distressed Enrica, who sat speechless before her terrible aunt —"I know she still loves him. The love of a heart like hers is not to be destroyed by such a letter as that, and the unjust accusations it contains."

Fra Pacifico pointed with his finger to Nobili's letter lying where he had placed it on the table. Seeing the letter, Enrica started back and shivered.

"Is it not so, Enrica?"

The little blond head and the sad blue eyes bowed themselves gently in response. A faint smile

flitted across Enrica's face. Fra Pacifico had spoken all her mind, which she in her weakness could not have done, especially with her aunt's dark eyes riveted upon her.

"Then you still love Count Nobili?" The Marchesa accentuated each word with bitter emphasis.

"I do," answered Enrica, faintly.

"If Count Nobili returns here will you marry him?"

As the Marchesa spoke Enrica trembled like a leaf. "What was she to answer?" The little composure she had been able to assume utterly forsook her. She who had believed that nothing was left but to die, was suddenly called upon to live!

"Oh! my aunt," Enrica cried, springing to her feet, "how can I look Nobili in the face after that letter? He thinks I have deceived him."

Enrica stopped; the words seemed to choke her. With an imploring look, she turned towards Fra Pacifico. Without knowing what she did Enrica flung herself on the floor at his feet; she clasped his knees—she turned her beseeching eyes into his.

"Oh! my father, help me! Nobili is my very life. How can I refuse what is my very life? When Nobili left me my first thought was to die!"

"Surely, my daughter, not by a violent death?" asked Fra Pacifico, stooping over her.

"Yes, yes," and Enrica wrung her hands, "Yes, I would have done it—I could not bear to live without him."

A look of sorrow and reproach darkened Fra Pacifico's brow. He crossed himself. "God be praised," he exclaimed, "you were saved from that wickedness!"

"My father"—Enrica extended her arms towards him—"I implore you—for the love of Jesus—let me enter a convent!"

In these few and simple words Enrica had tried all her powers of persuasion. The words were addressed to the priest, but her blue eyes filled with tears gathered themselves upon the Marchesa imploringly. Enrica awaited her fate in silence. The priest rose and gently replaced her on her chair. All the benevolence of his manly nature was called forth. He cast a searching glance at the Marchesa. Nothing betrayed her feelings.

"Calm yourself, Enrica," Fra Pacifico said soothingly. "No one seeks to hurry or to force you.—But I could not for a moment sanction your entering a convent. In your present state of mind it would be an unholy and an unnatural act."

Although outwardly unmoved, never in her life

had the Marchesa felt such exultation. Had Fra Pacifico seconded Enrica's proposal to enter a convent, all would have been lost! Still nothing was absolutely decided. It was possible Fra Pacifico might yet frustrate her plans. She ventured another question.

"If Count Nobili meets you at the altar you will not then refuse to marry him?"

There was an imperceptible tremor in the Marchesa's voice. The suspense was becoming intolerable to her.

"Refuse to marry him? Refuse Nobili? No, no, I can refuse Nobili nothing," answered Enrica, dreamily. "But he will not come!—He is gone for ever!"

"He will come," insisted the Marchesa, pushing her advantage skilfully.

"But will he love me?" asked the tender young voice. "Will he believe that I love him? Oh! tell me that! Father Pacifico, help me! I cannot think." Enrica pressed her hands to her forehead. She had suffered so much, now that the crisis had come she was stunned,—she had no power to decide. "Dare I marry him?—Ought we to part for ever?" A flush gathered on her cheek, an ineffable longing shone from her eyes. More than life was in the balance—not only to Enrica, but to the

Marchesa—the Marchesa, who wrapped within the veil of her impenetrable reserve breathlessly awaited an answer.

Fra Pacifico showed unmistakable signs of agitation. He rose from his chair, and for some minutes strode rapidly up and down the room, the floor creaking under his heavy tread. The life of this fragile girl lay in his hands. How could he resist that pleading look? Enrica had done nothing wrong. Was Enrica to suffer — die perhaps, because Nobili had wrongfully accused her? Fra Pacifico passed his large muscular hand thoughtfully over his clean-shaven chin, then stopped to gaze upon her. Her lips were parted, her eyes dilated to their utmost limit.

"My child," he said at last, laying his hand upon her head with fatherly tenderness—"My child, if Count Nobili returns here you will be justified in marrying him."

Enrica sank back and closed her eyes. A great leap of joy overwhelmed her. She dared not question her happiness. To behold Nobili once more —only to behold him—filled her with rapture.

"What is your answer, Enrica? I must hear your answer from yourself."

The Marchesa spoke out of the darkness. She

shrank from allowing Fra Pacifico to scrutinize the exultation marked on her every feature.

"My aunt, if Nobili comes here to claim me I will marry him," answered Enrica, more firmly. "But stop,"—her eye had meanwhile travelled to the letter still lying on the table—a horrible doubt crossed her mind. "Will Nobili know that I am not what he says there—in that letter?"

Enrica could bring herself to say no more. She longed to ask all that had happened about Count Montalto, and how her name had been mixed up with his — but the words refused to come.

"Leave that to me," answered the Marchesa imperiously. "If Count Nobili comes to marry you, is not that proof enough that he is satisfied?"

Enrica felt that it must be so. A wild joy possessed her. This joy was harder to bear than the pain. Enrica was actually sinking under the hope that Nobili might return to her!

Fra Pacifico noticed the grey shadow that was creeping over her face.

"Enrica must go at once to her room," he said, abruptly, "else I cannot answer for the consequences. Her strength is overtaxed."

As he spoke Fra Pacifico hastily opened the door leading into the Sala. He took Enrica by

the hand and raised her. She was perfectly passive. The Marchesa rose also; for the first time she came into the full light of the lamp. Enrica stooped and kissed her hand mechanically.

"My niece, you may prepare for your approaching marriage. Count Nobili will be here shortly—never fear."

The Marchesa's manner was strange — almost menacing. Fra Pacifico led Enrica across the Sala to her own door. When he returned the Marchesa was again reading Count Nobili's letter.

"A love-match in the Guinigi family!" She was laughing with derision. "What are we coming to!"

She tore the letter into innumerable fragments.

"My father, I shall leave for Lucca early tomorrow. You must look after Enrica. I am satisfied with what has passed."

"God send we have done right," answered the priest, gloomily. "Now at least, she has a chance of life."

"Adieu, Fra Pacifico. When next we meet it will be at the marriage."

Fra Pacifico withdrew. Had he done his duty? —Fra Pacifico dared not ask himself the question.

CHAPTER VI.

The Church and the Law

TEN days after the departure of the Marchesa, Fra Pacifico received the following letter

"REVEREND AND ESTEEMED FATHER,

"I have put the matter of Enrica's marriage into the hands of the well-known advocate, Maestro Guglielmi, of Lucca. He at once left for Rome. By extraordinary diligence he procured a summons for Count Nobili to appear within fifteen days before the tribunal, to answer in person for his breach of marriage contract—unless, before the expiration of that time, he should make the contract good by marriage. The citation was left with the secretary at Count Nobili's own house. Maestro Guglielmi also informed the secretary by my order, that, in default of his—Count Nobili's—appearance, a detailed account of the whole transaction with my niece, and of other transactions touching Count Nobili's father, known to me—of which I have informed Maestro Guglielmi—would be published,—

upon my authority,—in every newspaper in all the cities throughout Italy, with such explanations and particulars as I might see fit to insert. Also that the name of Count Nobili, as a slanderer and a perjurer, should be placarded on all the spare walls of Lucca, at Florence, and throughout Tuscany. The secretary denied any knowledge of his master's present address. He declared that he was unable, therefore, to communicate with him.

"In the meantime a knowledge of the facts had spread through this city. The public voice is with us to a man. Once more the citizens have rallied round the great Guinigi name. Crowds assemble daily before Count Nobili's palace. His name is loudly execrated by the citizens. Stones have been thrown, and windows broken; indeed there are threats of burning the palace. The authorities have not interfered. Count Nobili has now, I hear, returned privately to Lucca. He dares not show himself, or he would be stabbed; but Count Nobili's lawyer has had a conference with Maestro Guglielmi. Cavaliere Trenta insisted upon being present. This was against my will. Cavaliere Trenta always says too much. Maestro Guglielmi gave Count Nobili's lawyer three days to decide. At the expiration of that time Signor Guglielmi met him again. Count Nobili's lawyer declared that with the utmost dif-

ficulty he had prevailed upon his client to make good the contract by the religious ceremony of marriage. Let everything therefore be ready for the ceremony. This letter is private. You will say nothing further to my niece than that Count Nobili will arrive at Corellia at two o'clock the day after to-morrow to marry her. Farewell.

"Your friend and well-wisher,

"MARCHESA GUINIGI."

* * * * * *

The morning of the third day rose grey and chill at Corellia. Much rain had fallen during the night, and a damp mist streamed up from the valleys, shutting out the mighty range of mountains. In the plains of Pisa and Florence the October sun still blazed glorious as ever on the lush grass and flowery meadows,—on the sluggish streams and the rich blossoms. There, the trees still rustled in green luxuriance, to soft breezes perfumed with orange-trees and roses. But in the mountain fastnesses of the Apennines Autumn had come on apace. Such faded leaves as clung to the shrubs about the villa were drooping under the weight of the rain-drops, and the few autumnal flowers that still lit up the broad borders lay prostrate on the earth. Each tiny stream and brawling watercourse

—even mere little humble rills that dried up in Summer—now rushed downwards over rocks and stones blackened with moss, to pour themselves into the river Serchio. In the forest the turf was carpeted with yellow leaves, carried hither and thither by the winds. The stems and branches of the chestnuts ranged themselves, tier above tier, like silver pillars, against the red sandstone of the rocks. The year was dying out, and with the year all nature was dying out likewise.

Within the villa a table was spread in the great Sala with wine and such simple refreshments as the brief notice allowed. As the morning advanced, clouds gathered more thickly over the heavens. The gloomy daylight coming in at the doors and through the many windows, caught up no ray within. The vaguely sailing ships painted upon the wall, destined never to find a port in those unknown seas for which their sails were set,—and that exasperating company opposite, that through all changes of weal or woe danced remorselessly under the greenwood, —were shrouded in misty shadows.

Not a sound broke the silence—nothing save the striking of the clock at Corellia, bringing with it visions of the dark old church,—the kneeling women,—and the peace of God within. Even Argo

and his friends—Juno and Tuzzi, and the bull-dog —were mute.

About twelve o'clock the Marchesa arrived from Lucca. In her company came the Cavaliere Trenta and Maestro Guglielmi. Fra Pacifico was in waiting. He received them with grave courtesy. Adamo arrayed by Pipa in his Sunday clothes with a flower behind his ear, and Silvestro, stood uncovered at the entrance. Once, and once only, Silvestro abstained from addressing his mistress with his usual question about her health.

Maestro Guglielmi was formally presented to Fra Pacifico by the punctilious Cavaliere, now restored to his usual health and spirits. The Cavaliere had arrayed himself in his official uniform—dark purple velvet embroidered with gold. Not having worn the uniform however, for more than twenty years, the coat was much too small for him. In his hand he carried a white staff of office. This served him as a stick. Coming up from Lucca, the Cavaliere had reflected that on him solely must rest the care of imparting some show of dignity to the ceremony about to take place. He resolved that he would be equal to the occasion, whatever might occur.

There was a strange hush upon each one of the little group met in the Sala. Each was busy with

his own thoughts. The marriage about to take place was to the Marchesa the resurrection of the Guinigi name. To Fra Pacifico it was the possible rescue of Enrica from a life of suffering, perhaps an early death. To Guglielmi it was the triumph of the keen lawyer, who had tracked and pursued his prey until that prey had yielded. To the Cavaliere it was simply an act of justice which Count Nobile owed to Enrica, after the explanations he—Trenta—had given to him through his lawyer, respecting Count Montalto. Such an act of justice as the paternal government of his master the Duke of Lucca would have forced, upon the strength of his absolute prerogative, irrespective of law. The only person not outwardly affected was the Marchesa. The Marchesa had said nothing since her arrival, but there was a haughty alacrity of step and movement as she walked down the Sala towards the door of her own apartment, that spoke more than words.

No sooner had the sound of her closing door died away in the echoes of the Sala than Trenta, with forward bows both to Fra Pacifico and the lawyer, requested permission to leave them, in order to visit Enrica. Guglielmi and Fra Pacifico were now alone. Guglielmi gave a cautious glance round, then walked up to the table, and poured out a tumbler of wine, which he swallowed slowly. As

he did so, he was engaged in closely scrutinizing Fra Pacifico, who, full of anxiety as to what was about to happen, stood lost in thought.

Maestro Guglielmi, whose age might be about forty, was a man once seen not easily forgotten—a tall slight man of quick subtle movements, that betrayed the devouring activity within. Maestro Guglielmi had a perfectly colourless face, a prominent eager nose, thin lips, that perpetually unclosed to a ghostly smile in which the other features took no part; a brow already knitted with those fine wrinkles indicative of constant study, and overhanging eyebrows that framed a pair of eyes that read you like a book. It would have been a bold man who, with those eyes fixed on him, would have told a lie to Maestro Guglielmi, advocate in the High Court of Lucca. If any man had so lied, those eyes would have gathered up the light, and flashed it forth again in lightnings that might consume him. That they were dark and flaming,—and greatly dreaded by all on whom Guglielmi fixed them in opposition, was generally admitted by his legal compeers.

"Reverend sir," began Maestro Guglielmi blandly, stepping up to where the priest stood a little apart, and speaking in a metallic voice audible in any court of law, be it ever so closely packed,—"It

gratifies me much that chance has so ordered it that we two are left alone." Guglielmi took out his watch. "We have a good half hour to spare."

Fra Pacifico turned, and for the first time contemplated the lawyer attentively. As he did so he noted with surprise the power of his eyes.

"I earnestly desire some conversation with you," continued Guglielmi, the semblance of a smile flitting over his hard face. "Can we speak here securely?" And the lawyer glanced round at the various doors, and particularly to an open one, which led from the Sala to the Chapel, at the further end of the house. Fra Pacifico moved forward and closed it.

"You are quite safe—say what you please," he answered bluntly. His frank nature rose involuntarily against the cunning of Guglielmi's look and manner. "We have no spies here."

"Pardon me, I did not mean to insinuate that. But what I have to say is strictly private."

Fra Pacifico eyed Guglielmi with no friendly expression.

"I know you well by repute, Reverend sir,"—with one comprehensive glance Guglielmi seemed to take in Fra Pacifico mentally and physically—"Therefore it is that I address myself to you."

The priest crossed his arms and bowed.

"The Marchesa has confided to me the charge of this most delicate case. Hitherto I have conducted it with success. It is not my habit to fail. I have succeeded in convincing Count Nobili's lawyer, and through him Count Nobili himself, that it would be suicidal to his interests should he not make good the marriage contract with the Marchesa Guinigi's niece. If Count Nobili refuses he must leave the country. He has established himself in Lucca, and desires, as I understand, to remain there. My noble client has done me the honour to inform me that she is acquainted with, and can prove some act of villainy committed by his father —who, though he ended his life as an eminent banker at Florence, began it as a money-lender at Leghorn. Count Nobili's father filled in a blank cheque which a client had incautiously left in his hands, to an enormous amount, or something of that kind, I believe. I refused to notice this circumstance legally, feeling sure that we were strong enough without it. I was also sure that giving publicity to such a fact would only prejudice the position of the future husband of the Marchesa's niece. To return. Fortunately Count Nobili's lawyer saw the case as I put it to him. Count Nobili will undoubtedly be here at two o'clock." Again the lawyer took out his watch, looked at it, and re-

placed it with rapidity. "A good deal of hard work is comprised in that sentence, 'Count Nobili will be here!'" Again there was the ghost of a smile. "Lawyers must not always be judged by the result. In this case however the result is favourable, eminently favourable."

Fra Pacifico's face deepened into a look of disgust, but he said nothing.

"Count Nobili once here and joined to the young lady by the Church, *we must keep him.* The spouses must pass twenty-four hours under the same roof to complete and legalize the marriage. I am here officially, to see that Count Nobili attends at the time appointed for the ceremony. In reality, I am here to see that Count Nobili remains. This must be no formal union. They must be bound together irrevocably. You must help me, Reverend sir."

Maestro Guglielmi turned quickly upon Fra Pacifico. His eyes ran all over him. The priest drew back.

"I have already stretched my conscience to the utmost for the sake of the lady. I can do nothing more."

"But, my father—it is surely to the lady's advantage that, if the Count marries her, they should live together, that heirs should be born to them?"

pleaded Guglielmi in a most persuasive voice. "If the Count separates from his wife after the ceremony, how can this be? We do not live in the days of miracles, though we have an infallible Pope. Eh, my father? Not in the days of miracles." Guglielmi gave an ironical laugh, and his eyes twinkled. "Besides, there is the civil ceremony."

"The Sindaco of Corellia can be present, if you please, for the civil marriage."

"Unfortunately there is no time to call the Sindaco now," replied Guglielmi. "If Count Nobili remains the night in company with his bride, we shall have no difficulty about the civil marriage tomorrow. Count Nobili will not object then. Not likely."

The lawyer gave a harsh cynical laugh that grated offensively upon the priest's ear. Fra Pacifico began to think Maestro Guglielmi intolerable.

"That is your affair. I will undertake no further responsibility," responded Fra Pacifico doggedly.

"You cannot mean, my father, that you will not help me?" And Guglielmi contemplated Fra Pacifico fixedly with all the lightnings he could bring to bear upon him. To his amazement he produced no effect whatever. Fra Pacifico remained silent. Altogether this was a priest different from any he

had ever met with. Guglielmi hated priests—he began to be interested in Fra Pacifico.

"Well, well," was Guglielmi's reply, with an aspect of intense chagrin, "I had better hopes. Your position, Fra Pacifico, as a peacemaker—as a friend of the family—However,"—here the lawyer shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes wandered restlessly up and down the room,—"However at least permit me to tell you what I intend to do—"

Fra Pacifico bowed coldly.

"As you please," was his reply.

Maestro Guglielmi advanced close to Fra Pacifico, and lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"The circumstances attending this marriage are becoming very public. My client the Marchesa Guinigi considers her position so exalted she dares to court publicity. She forgets we are not in the Middle Ages. Ha! Ha!" and Guglielmi showed his teeth in a smile that was nothing but a grin—"Publicity will be fatal to the young lady. This the Marchesa fails to see; but I see it, and you see it, my father."

Fra Pacifico shook himself all over as though silently rejecting any possible participation in Maestro Guglielmi's arguments. Guglielmi quite understood the gesture but continued, perfectly at his ease—

"The high rank of the young lady,—the wealth

of the Count,—a marriage contract broken,—an illustrious name libelled,—Count Nobili, a well-known member of the Jockey Club, in concealment,—the Lucchese populace roused to fury—all these details have reached the capital. A certain Royal Personage"—Here Guglielmi drew himself up pompously, and waved his hand, as was his wont in the fervour of a grand peroration—"A certain Royal Personage, who has reasons of his own for avoiding unnecessary scandal—(possibly because the Royal Personage causes so much himself,—and considers scandal his own prerogative)"—Guglielmi emphasised his joke with such scintillation as would metaphorically have taken any other man than Fra Pacifico off his legs—even Fra Pacifico stared at him with astonishment—"A certain Royal Personage I say—earnestly desires that this affair should be amicably arranged—that the Republican party should not have the gratification of gloating over a sensational trial between two noble families. The Republicans would make terrible capital out of it. —A certain Personage desires I say that the affair should be arranged—amicably arranged—not only by a formal marriage—the formal marriage of course we positively insist on—but by a complete reconciliation between the parties. If this should not be so, the present ceremony will infallibly lead to a

law-suit respecting the civil marriage,—the domicile —and the cohabitation,—which it is distinctly understood that Count Nobili will refuse, and that the Marchesa Guinigi, acting for her niece, will maintain. It is essential, therefore, that more than the formal ceremony shall take place. It is essential that the subsequent cohabitation——"

"I see your drift," interrupted downright Fra Pacifico, in his blunt way—"No need to go into further details."

Spite of himself Fra Pacifico had become interested in the narrative. The cunning lawyer intended that Fra Pacifico should become so interested. What was the strong-fisted, simple-hearted priest beside such a sophist as Maestro Guglielmi?

"The Royal Personage in question," continued Guglielmi, who read in Fra Pacifico's frank countenance that he had conquered his repugnance,—"has done me the high honour of communicating to me his august sentiments. I have pledged myself to do all I can to prevent the catastrophe of law. My official capacity, however, ends with Count Nobili's presence here at the appointed hour."

At the word "hour" Guglielmi hastily pulled out his watch.

"Only a few minutes more," he muttered. "But this is not all—listen, my father."

He gave a hasty glance round, then put his lips close to the priest's ear.

"If I succeed—may I say *we*?" he added, insinuatingly,—"if *we* succeed, a canonry will be offered to you, Fra Pacifico—and I—" Guglielmi's speaking eyes became brilliantly emphatic now—"I shall be appointed judge of the tribunal at Lucca."

"Pshaw!" cried Fra Pacifico retreating from him with an expression of blank disappointment. "I a canon at Lucca!—If that is to be the consequence of success, you must depend on yourself, Signor Guglielmi. I decline to help you. I would not be a canon at Lucca if the King of Italy asked me in person."

Guglielmi, whose tactics were, if he failed, never to show it,—smiled his falsest smile.

"Noble disinterestedness!" he exclaimed, drawing his delicate hand across his brow. "Nothing could have raised your Reverence higher in my esteem than this refusal!"

To conceal his real annoyance Maestro Guglielmi turned away and coughed. It was a diplomatic cough, ready on all emergencies. Again he consulted his watch.

"Five minutes more, then we must assemble at

the altar. A fine will be levied upon Count Nobili if he is not punctual."

"If it is so near the time, I must beg you to excuse me," said Fra Pacifico, glad to escape.

Fra Pacifico walked rapidly towards the door opening into the corridor leading to the Chapel. His retreating figure was followed by a succession of fireworks from Guglielmi's eyes, indicative of indignation and contempt.

"He who sleeps catches no fish," the lawyer muttered to himself, biting his lips. "But the priest will help me—spite of himself, he will help me. A health to Holy Mother Church! She would not do much if all her ministers were like this country clod. He is without ambition. He has quite fatigued me."

Saying this, Maestro Guglielmi poured out another glass of wine. He critically examined the wine in the light before putting it to his lips; then he swallowed it with an expression of approbation.

CHAPTER VII.

The Hour strikes.

THE Chapel was approached by a door communicating with the corridor. (There was another entrance from the garden; at this entrance Adamo was stationed.) It was narrow and lofty—more like a gallery than a chapel, except that the double windows at either end were arched and filled with stained glass. The altar was placed in a recess facing the door opening from the corridor. It was of dark marble raised on steps, and was backed by a painting too much blackened by smoke to be distinguished. Within the rails stood Fra Pacifico, arrayed in a vestment of white and gold. The grand outline of his tall figure filled the front of the altar. No one would have recognised the parish priest in the stately ecclesiastic who wore his robes with so much dignity. Beside Fra Pacifico was Angelo transformed into an acolyte, wearing a linen surplice—Angelo awed into perfect propriety,—swinging a silver censer, and only to be recognised by the twinkling of his wicked eyes—(not even Fra Pacifico could tame them). To the right of the

altar stood the Marchesa. Maestro Guglielmi, tablets in hand, was beside her. Behind, at a respectful distance, appeared Silvestro, gathered up into the smallest possible compass.

As the slow moments passed all stood so motionless—all save Angelo swinging the silver censer,—they might have passed for a sculptured group upon a marble tomb. One,—Two,—struck from the old clock in the Lombard Tower at Corellia. At the last stroke the door from the garden was thrown open. Count Nobili stood in the doorway. At the moment of Count Nobili's appearance Maestro Guglielmi drew out his watch; then he proceeded to note upon his tablets that Count Nobili having observed the appointed time, was not subject to a fine.

Count Nobili paused on the threshold, then he advanced to the altar. That he had come in haste was apparent. His dress was travel-stained and dusty; the locks of his abundant chestnut hair matted and rough; his whole appearance wild and disordered. All the outward polish of the man was gone; the happy smile contagious in its brightness; the pleasant curl of the upper lip raising the fair moustache; the kindling eye so capable of tenderness. His expression was of a man undergoing a

terrible ordeal; defiance, shame, anger, contended on his face.

There was something in the studied negligence of Count Nobili's appearance that irritated the Marchesa to the last degree of endurance. She bridled with rage, and exchanged a significant glance with Guglielmi.

Footsteps were now heard coming from the Sala. It was Enrica led by the Cavaliere. Enrica was whiter than her bridal veil. She had suffered Pipa to array her as she pleased without a word. Her hair was arranged in a coronet upon her head; a whole sheaf of golden curls hung down from it behind. There was the exquisite symmetry of form, the natural grace, the dreamy beauty,—all the soft harmony of colour upon her oval face—but the freshness of girlhood was gone. Enrica had made a desperate effort to be calm. Nobili was under the same roof,—in the same room—Nobili was beside her. Would he not show some sign that he still loved her?—Else why had he come?—One glance at him was enough. Oh! he was changed! —She could not bear it. Enrica would have fled had not Trenta held her. The Marchesa too advanced a step or two, and cast upon her a look so menacing that it filled her with terror. Trembling all over Enrica clung to the Cavaliere. He led her

gently forward, and placed her beside Count Nobili standing at the altar. Thus unsupported, Enrica tottered—she seemed about to fall. No hand was stretched out to help her.

Nobili had turned visibly pale as Enrica entered. His face was averted. The witnesses, Adamo and Silvestro, ranged themselves on either side. The Marchesa and Maestro Guglielmi drew nearer to the altar. Angelo waved the censer, walking to and fro before the rails. Pipa peeped in at the open doorway. Her eyes were red with weeping. Pipa looked round aghast.

"What a marriage was this! More like a death than a marriage! She would not have married so —not if it had cost her her life.—No music, no rose-leaves, no dance, no wine. None had even changed their clothes but the Cavaliere and the Signorina. And a bridegroom like that!—A statue —not a living man! And the Signorina—Poverina, —hardly able to stand upon her feet. The Signorina would be sure to faint, she was so weak."

Pipa had to muffle her face in her handkerchief to drown her sobs. Then Fra Pacifico's impressive voice broke the silence with the opening words of exhortation.

"Deus Israel sit vobiscum."

"Gloria Patri," was the response in Angelo's childish treble.

Enrica and Nobili now knelt side by side. Two lighted tapers, typical of chaste love, were placed on the floor beside them on either hand. The image of the Virgin on the altar was uncovered. The tall candles flickered. Enrica and Nobili knelt side by side—The man who had ceased to love, and the woman who still loved, but who dared not confess her love!

As Fra Pacifico proceeded, Count Nobili's face hardened. Was not the basilisk eye of the Marchesa upon him? Her lawyer too, taking notes of every look and gesture?

"Mario Nobili, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wife?" asked the priest. Turning from the altar Fra Pacifico faced Count Nobili as he put this question.

A hot flush overspread Nobili's face. He opened his lips to speak, but no words were audible. Would the words not come, or would Nobili at the last moment refuse to utter them?

"Mario Nobili, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?" sternly repeated Fra Pacifico fixing his dark eyes upon him.

"I will," answered Nobili. Whatever his feelings were Nobili had mastered them.

For an instant Nobili's eye met Enrica's. He turned hastily away. Enrica sighed. Whatever hopes had buoyed her up were gone. Nobili had turned away from her!

Fra Pacifico placed Enrica's hand in that of Nobili. Poor little hand—how it trembled! Ah! would Nobili not recall how fondly he had clasped it? What kisses he had showered upon each rosy little finger! So lately, too! No—Nobili is impassive—not a feature of his face changes. But the contact of Nobili's beloved hand utterly overcame Enrica. The limit of her endurance was reached. Again the shadow of death was upon her—the shadow that had led her to the dark abyss——

When Nobili dropped her hand Enrica leant forward upon the edge of the marble rails. She hid her head upon her arms. Her long hair, escaped from the fastening, shrouded her face.

"Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus,"—spoke the deep voice of Fra Pacifico.

He made the sign of the cross. The address followed. The priest's last words died away in sonorous echoes. It was done. They were man and wife!

Fra Pacifico had by no outward sign betrayed what he felt during the discharge of his office; but

his conscience sorely smote him. He asked himself with dismay if, in helping Enrica, he had not committed a mortal sin? Hitherto he had defended Count Nobili—now his whole soul rose against him. "Would Nobili say nothing in justification?" Spite of himself Fra Pacifico's fists clenched themselves under his vestments.

But Nobili was about to speak. He gave a hurried glance round the circle—upon Enrica kneeling at the altar. With the air of a man who forces himself to do a hateful penance, he broke silence.

"In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament,"—his voice was thick and hoarse—"I declare that, after the explanations given, I withdraw my accusations. I hold that lady, now Countess Nobili,"—and he pointed to the motionless mass of white drapery kneeling beside him,—"I hold that lady innocent in thought and life. But I include her in the just indignation with which I regard this house and its mistress, whose agent she has made herself to deceive me."

Count Nobili's kindling eye rested on the Marchesa. She, in her turn, shot a furious glance at the Cavaliere.

("'Explanations given.' Then Trenta had dared to exonerate Enrica! It was degrading!")

"This reparation made," continued Count No-

bili—"My name and hand given to her by the Church—honour is satisfied—I will never live with her!"

Was there no mercy in the man as he pronounced these last words? No appeal? No mercy? Or had the Marchesa driven him to bay?

The Marchesa!—Nobili's last words had shattered the whole fabric of her ambition! Never for a moment had the Marchesa doubted that the marriage once over Nobili would have seriously refused the splendid position she offered him. Look at her!—She cannot conceal her consternation.

"I invite you therefore, Maestro Guglielmi,"—the studied calmness of Nobili's manner belied the agitation of his voice and aspect—"You, Maestro Guglielmi, who have been called here expressly to insult me—I invite you to advise the Marchesa Guinigi to accept what I am willing to offer."

"To insult you, Count Nobili?" exclaimed Guglielmi, looking round. (Guglielmi had turned aside to write a few hurried words upon his tablets, torn out the leaf, and slipped it into the Marchesa's hand. So rapidly was this done no one had perceived it.) "To insult you! Surely not to insult you! Allow me to explain."

"Silence!" thundered Fra Pacifico standing before the altar—"In the name of God, Silence! Let

those who desire to wrangle choose a fitter place. There can be no contentions in the presence of the Sacrament. The declaration of Count Nobili's belief in the virtue of his wife I permitted. I listened to what followed, praying that, if human aid failed, God, hearing his blasphemy against the holy sacrament of marriage, might touch his heart. In the hands of God I leave him!"

Having thus spoken, Frą Pacifico replaced the Host in the ciborium, and, assisted by Angelo, proceeded to divest himself of his robes, which he laid one by one upon the altar.

At this instant the Marchesa rose and left the Chapel. Count Nobili's eyes followed her with a look of absolute loathing. Without one glance at Enrica, still immovable, her head buried on her arms—Nobili left the altar. He walked slowly to the window at the further end of the Chapel. Turning his back upon all present he took from his pocket a parchment, which he perused with deep attention.

All this time Cavaliere Trenta, radiant in his official costume, his white staff of office in his right hand, had remained standing behind Enrica. Each instant he expected to see her rise, when it would devolve on him to lead her away; but she had not stirred. Now the Cavaliere felt that the fitting

moment had fully come for Enrica to withdraw. Indeed, he wondered within himself why she had remained so long.

"Enrica, rise my child," he said softly. "There is nothing more to be done. The ceremony is over."

Still Enrica did not move. Fra Pacifico leant over the altar rails, and gently raised her head. It dropped back upon his hand—Enrica had fainted.

This discovery caused the most terrible commotion. Pipa, who had watched everything from the door, screamed and ran forward. Fra Pacifico was bending over the prostrate girl, supported in the arms of the Cavaliere.

"I feared this," Fra Pacifico whispered. "Thank God, I believe it is only momentary! We must carry her instantly to her room. I will take care of her."

"Poor broken flower!" cried Trenta, "Who will raise thee up?" His voice came thick, struggling with sobs. "Can you see that unmoved, Count Nobili?"—Trenta pointed to the retreating figure of Fra Pacifico bearing Enrica in his arms.

At the sound of Trenta's voice, Count Nobili started and turned round. Enrica had already disappeared.

"You will soon give her another bridegroom—

he will not leave her as you have done. That bridegroom will be death! To-day it is the bridal veil — to-morrow it will be the shroud. Not a month ago she lay upon what might have been her deathbed. Your infamous letter did that!" The remembrance of that letter roused the Cavaliere out of himself; he cared not what he said. "That letter almost killed her.—Would to God she had died!—What has she done?—She is an angel!—We were all here when you signed the contract. Why did you break it?"—Trenta's shrill voice had risen into a kind of wail. "Do you mean to doubt what I told you at Lucca?—I swear to you that Enrica never knew that she was offered in marriage to Count Montalto.—I swear it!—I did it.—It was my fault. I persuaded the Marchesa. It was I.—Enrica and Count Montalto never met but in my presence. And you revenge yourself on her?—If you had the heart of a man you could not do it!"

"It is because I have the heart of a man I will not suffer degradation!" cried Nobili. "It is because I have the heart of a man I will not sink into an unworthy tool!—This is why I refuse to live with her. She is one of a vile conspiracy. She has joined with the Marchesa against me. I have been forced to marry her. I will not live with her!"

Count Nobili stopped suddenly. An agonised expression came into his face.

"I screened her in the first fury of my anger—I screened her when I believed her guilty. Now it is too late—God help her!" He turned abruptly away.

Cavaliere Trenta, whose vehemence had died away as suddenly as it had risen, crept to the door. He threw up his hands in despair. There was no help for Enrica!

All this time Maestro Guglielmi's keen eyes had noted everything. He was on the look-out for evidence. Persons under strong emotions as a rule commit themselves. Count Nobili was young and hot-headed. Count Nobili would probably commit himself. Up to this time Count Nobili had said nothing however that could be made use of. Guglielmi's ready brain worked incessantly. If he could carry out the plan he had formed he might yet be a judge within the year. Already Guglielmi feels the touch of the soft fur upon his official robes!

After the Cavaliere's departure Guglielmi advanced. He had been standing so entirely concealed in the shadow thrown by the altar, that Nobili had forgotten his presence. Nobili now stared at him in angry surprise.

"With your permission," said the lawyer with a low bow accosting Nobili, "I hope to convince you how much you have wronged me by your accusation."

"What accusation?" demanded the Count, drawing back towards the window. "I do not understand you."

Guglielmi was the Marchesa's adviser; Count Nobili hated him.

"Your accusation that 'I am here to insult you.' If you will do me the honour, Count Nobili, to speak to me in private,"—Guglielmi glanced at Silvestro, Adamo, and Angelo peering out half hid by the altar—"If you will do me this honour, I will prove to you that I am here to serve you."

"That is impossible," answered Nobili. "Nor do I care. I leave this house immediately."

"But allow me to observe, Count Nobili," and Maestro Guglielmi drew himself up with an air of offended dignity, "You are bound as a gentleman to retract those words, or to hear my explanation." (Delay at any price was Guglielmi's object.) "Surely, Count Nobili, you cannot refuse me this satisfaction?"

Count Nobili hesitated. What could this strange man have to say to him?

Guglielmi watched him.

"You will spare me half an hour!" he urged. "That will suffice."

Count Nobili looked greatly embarrassed.

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Guglielmi, accepting his silence for consent. "I will not trespass needlessly on your time. Permit me to find some one to conduct you to a room."

Guglielmi looked round—Angelo came forward.

"Conduct Count Nobili to the room prepared for him," said the lawyer. "There, Count Nobili I will attend you in a few minutes."

CHAPTER VIII.

For the Honour of a Name.

When the Marchesa entered the Sala after she had left the Chapel, her steps were slow and measured. Count Nobili's words rang in her ear:—"I will not live with her." She could not put these words from her. For the first time in her life the Marchesa was shaken in the belief of her mission.

If Count Nobili refused to live with Enrica as his wife, all the law in the world could not force him. If no heir was born to the Guinigi, she had lived in vain.

As the Marchesa stood in the dull light of the misty afternoon, leaning against the solid carved table on which refreshments were spread, the old palace at Lucca rose up before her dyed with the ruddy tints of Summer sunsets. She trod again in thought those mysterious rooms, shrouded in perpetual twilight. She gazed upon the faces of the dead, looking down upon her from the walls. How could she answer to those dead for what she had done? That heroic face too with the stern, soft eyes—how could she meet it? What was Count

Nobili or his wealth to her without an heir? By threats she had forced Nobili to make Enrica his wife, but no threats could compel him to complete the marriage.

As she lingered in the Sala, stunned by the blow that had fallen upon her, the Marchesa suddenly recollected the pencilled lines which Guglielmi had torn from his tablets and slipped into her hand. She drew the paper from the folds of her dress and read these words:

"*We are beaten if Count Nobili leaves the house to-night. Keep him at all hazards.*"

A sudden revulsion seized her. She raised her head with that snake-like action natural to her. The blood rushed to her face and neck. Guglielmi then still had hope?—All was not lost. In an instant her energy returned to her. What could she do to keep him? Would Enrica——Enrica was still within the chapel. The Marchesa heard the murmur of voices coming through the corridor.—No, though she worshipped him, Enrica would never lend herself to tempt Nobili with the bait of her beauty—No—even though she was his wife. It would be useless to ask her. "Keep him—how?" the Marchesa asked herself with feverish impatience. Every moment was precious. She heard footsteps. They must be leaving the Chapel. Nobili perhaps

was going. No. The door to the garden, by which Nobili had entered the Chapel, was now locked. Adamo had given her the key. She must therefore see them when they passed out through the Sala. At this moment the howling of the dogs was audible. They were chained up in the cave under the tower. Poor beasts, they had been forgotten in the hurry of the day. The dogs were hungry; were yelping for their food. Through the open door the Marchesa saw Adamo pass—a sudden thought struck her.

"Adamo!"

"Padrona." And Adamo's bullet head and broad shoulders fill up the doorway.

"Where is Count Nobili?"

"Along with the lawyer from Lucca."

"He is safe then for the present," the Marchesa told herself.

Adamo could not speak for staring at his mistress as she stood opposite to him full in the light. He had never seen such a look upon her face all the years he had served her. She almost smiled at him.

"Adamo," the Marchesa addresses him eagerly —"Come here. How many years have you lived with me?"

Adamo grins and shows two rows of white teeth.

"Thirty years, Padrona—I came when I was a little lad."

"Have I treated you well, Adamo?"

As she asks this question, the Marchesa moves close to him.

"Have I ever complained," is Adamo's answer, "that the Marchesa asks me?"

"You saved my life, Adamo, not long ago—from the fire." The eager look is growing intenser. "I have never thanked you. Adamo——"

"Padrona,"—he is more and more amazed at her—"She must be going to die! Gesù mio!—I wish she would swear at me"—Adamo thought. "Padrona—don't thank me—Domine Dio did it."

"Take these,"—and the Marchesa puts her hand into her pocket and draws out some notes, "Take these—these are better than thanks."

Adamo drew back much affronted. "Padrona, I don't want money."

"Yes, yes, take them—for Pipa and the boys"—and she thrusts the notes into his big red hands.

After all, thought Adamo to himself, if the Padrona is going to die I may as well have these notes as another.

"I would save your life any day, Padrona," Adamo says aloud. "It is a pleasure."

"Would you?" The Marchesa fell into a muse.

Again the dogs howled. Adamo makes a motion to go to them.

"Were you going to feed the dogs when I called to you?" she asks.

"Padrona, yes. I was going to feed them."

"Are they very hungry?"

"Very—Poverini.—They have had nothing since this morning. Now it is five o'clock."

"Don't feed them, Adamo—don't feed them—" The Marchesa was strangely excited. She holds out her hand to detain him.

Adamo stares at her in mute consternation. "The Padrona is certainly going mad before she dies," he mutters, trying to get away.

"Adamo—come here!" He approaches her secretly, making horns against the Evil Eye with his fingers.

"You saved my life—now you must save my honour." The words come hissing into his ear. Adamo draws back a step or two. "Blessed Mother, what ails her?" But he held his tongue.

The Marchesa stands before him drawn up to her full height, every nerve and muscle strained to

the utmost. "Adamo—do you hear?—My honour —the honour of my name. Quick, quick!"

She lays her hand on his rough jacket and grasps it.

Adamo, struck with superstitious awe, cannot speak. He nods.

"The dogs are hungry you say. Let them loose without feeding. No one must leave the house to-night. Do you understand? You must prevent it. Let the dogs loose."

Again Adamo nods. He is utterly bewildered. He will obey her of course, but what can she mean?

"Is your gun loaded?" she asks anxiously.

"Yes, Padrona."

"That is well." A vindictive smile lights up her features. "No one must leave the house to-night. You understand? The dogs will be loose, —the guns loaded. Where is Pipa? Say nothing to Pipa—do you understand? Don't tell Pipa—"

"Understand? No, Diavolo! I don't understand," bursts out Adamo. "If you want anyone shot, tell me who it is, Padrona, and I will do it."

"That would be murder, Adamo." The Marchesa is standing very near him. Adamo sees the savage gleam that comes into her eyes. "If anyone leaves the house to-night except Fra Pacifico,

stop him, Adamo—stop him—you,—or the dogs —or the gun—no matter. Stop him I command you. I have my reasons. If a life is lost I cannot help it—nor can you, Adamo—Eh?"

She smiles grimly. Adamo smiles too, a stolid smile, and nods. He is greatly relieved. The Padrona is not mad, nor will she die.

"You may sleep in peace, Padrona." With the utmost respect Adamo raises her hand to his lips and kisses it. "Next time ask Adamo to do something more, and he will do it. Trust me, no one shall leave the house to-night alive."

The Marchesa listens to Adamo breathlessly. "Go—go," she says—"We must not be seen together."

"The Signora shall be obeyed," answers Adamo. He vanishes behind the trees.

"Now I can meet Guglielmi!" The Marchesa rapidly crosses the Sala to the door of her own room, which she leaves ajar.

CHAPTER IX.

Husband versus Wife.

THE room to which Angelo conducts Count Nobili is on the ground-floor, in the same wing as the Chapel. It is reached by the same corridor, which traverses all that side of the house. Into this corridor many other doors open. Pipa had chosen it because it was the best room in the house. From the high ceiling, painted in gay frescoes, hangs a large chandelier; the bed is covered with red damask curtains. Such furniture as was available had been carried thither by Pipa and Adamo. One large window, reaching to the ground, looks westward over the low wall.

The sun is setting. The mighty range of mountains are laced with gold; light fleecy cloudlets float across the sky. Behind rise banks of deepest saffron. These shift and move at first in chaos,—then they take the form as of a fiery city. There are domes —and towers—and pinnacles as of living flame that burn and glisten. Another moment, and the sun has sunk to rest. The phantom city fades—the ruddy background melts into the grey mountain

side. Dim ghost-like streaks linger about the double summits of La Pagna. They vanish. Nothing then remains but masses of leaden clouds soon to darken into night.

On entering the room, Count Nobili takes a long breath, gazes for a moment on the mountains that rise before him, then turns towards the door, awaiting the arrival of Guglielmi. His restless eye, his shifting colour, betray his agitation. The ordeal is not yet over—he must hear what this man has to say.

Maestro Guglielmi enters with a quick brisk step and easy confident bearing—indeed he is in the highest spirits. He had trembled lest Nobili should have insisted upon leaving Corellia immediately after the ceremony when it was still broad daylight. Several unforeseen circumstances had prevented this—Enrica's fainting-fit; the discussion that ensued upon it between Nobili and the old Chamberlain;—all this had created delay, and afforded him an appropriate opportunity of requesting a private interview. Besides, the cunning lawyer had noted that, during that discussion in the Chapel with Cavaliere Trenta, Nobili had evinced indications of other passions besides anger—indications of a certain tenderness in the midst of his vehement sense of the wrong done him by the Marchesa. But what was

of far more consequence to Guglielmi was, that all this had the effect of stopping Nobili's immediate departure. That Guglielmi had prevailed upon Nobili to enter the room prepared for him—that he had in so doing domiciled himself voluntarily under the same roof as his wife,—was an immense point gained.

All this filled Maestro Guglielmi with the prescience of success. With Nobili in the house, what might not the chapter of accidents produce? All this had occurred, too, without taking into account what the Marchesa herself might have planned, when she had read the note of instructions he had written upon a page of his tablets. Guglielmi thought he knew his friend and client the Marchesa Guinigi but little, if her fertile brain had not already created some complication that would have the effect of preventing Count Nobili's departure that night. The instant—the immediate instant—now lay with himself. He was about to make the most of it.

When Guglielmi entered the room, Count Nobili received him with an expression of undisguised disgust. Summoned by Nobili in a peremptory tone to say—Why he had brought him hither?—Guglielmi broke forth with extraordinary volubility. He had used, he declared, his influence with the

Marchesa throughout for his, Count Nobili's advantage—solely for his advantage. One word from him, and the Marchesa Guinigi would have availed herself of her legal claims in the most vindictive manner—exposed family secrets—made the whole transaction of the marriage public—and so revenged herself upon him that Count Nobili would have had no choice but to leave Lucca and Italy for ever.

"All this I have prevented," Guglielmi insisted emphatically. "How could I serve you better?—Could a brother have guarded your honour more jealously?—You will come to see and acknowledge the obligation in time—Yes, Count Nobili,—in time. Time brings all things to light. Time will exhibit my integrity, my disinterested devotion to your interests in their true aspect. All little difficulties settled with my illustrious client, the Marchesa Guinigi (a high-minded and most courageous lady of the heroic type)—established in Lucca in the full enjoyment of your enormous wealth,—with the lovely lady I have just seen by your side—the enlightened benefactor of the city—the patron of art—the consoler of distress—a leader of the young generation of nobles—the political head of the new Italian party—bearing the grandest name (of course you will adopt that of Guinigi)—adorning that name with the example of noble actions—a splendid

career opens before you. Yes, Count Nobili—Yes —a career worthy of the loftiest ambition!

"All this I have been the happy means of procuring for you. Another advocate might have exasperated the Marchesa's passions for his own purposes; it would have been most easy. But I," continued Guglielmi, bringing his flaming eyes to bear upon Count Nobili, then raising them from him outwards toward the darkening mountains as though he would call on the great Apennines to bear witness to his truth—"I have scorned such base considerations. With unexampled magnanimity I have brought about this marriage—all this I have done, actuated by the purest, the most single-hearted motives. In return, Count Nobili, I make one request—I entreat you to believe that I am your friend——"

(Before the lawyer had concluded his peroration professional zeal had so far transported him that he had convinced himself all he said was true—was he not indeed pleading for his judgeship?)

Guglielmi extended his arms as if about to embrace Count Nobili!

All this time Nobili had stood as far removed from him as possible. Nobili had neither moved nor raised his head once. He had listened to Guglielmi as the rocks listen to the splash of the

seething waves beating against their side. As the lawyer proceeded a deep flush gradually overspread his face. When he saw the lawyer's outstretched arms he retreated to the utmost limit of the room. Guglielmi's arms fell to his side.

"Whatever may be my opinion of you, Signor Avvocato," spoke the Count at length, contemplating Guglielmi fixedly, and speaking slowly, as if exercising a strong control over himself—"Whether I accept your friendship, or whether I believe any one word you say, is immaterial. It cannot affect in any way what is past. The declaration I made before the altar is the declaration to which I adhere—I am not bound to state my reasons. To me they are overwhelming. I must therefore decline all discussion with you. It is for you to make such arrangements with your client as will insure me a separation. That done our paths lie far apart."

Who would have recognised the gracious facile Count Nobili in these hard words? The haughty tone in which they were uttered added to their sting.

We are at best the creatures of circumstances—circumstances had entirely altered him. At that moment Nobili was at war with all the world. He hated himself—he hated and he mistrusted every-

one. Guglielmi was not certainly adapted to restore faith in mankind.

Legal habits had taught Maestro Guglielmi to shape his countenance into a mask fashioned to whatever expression he might desire to assume. Never had the trick been so difficult! The intense rage that possessed him was uncontrollable. For the first moment he stood stolidly mute. Then he struck the heel of his boot loudly upon the stuccoed floor.—Would he could crush Count Nobili thus! Crush him and trample upon him—Nobili—the only obstacle to the high honours awaiting him! The next instant Guglielmi was reproaching himself for his want of control—the next instant he was conscious how needful it was to dissemble. Was he—Guglielmi,—who had flashed his sword in a thousand battles to be worsted by a stubborn boy? Outwitted by a capricious lover?—Never!

"Excuse me, Count Nobili," he said, overmastering himself by a violent effort,—"It is a bitter pang to me, your devoted friend, to be asked to become a party to an act fatal to your prospects. If you adhere to your resolution, you can never return to Lucca—never inhabit the palace your wealth has so superbly decorated. Public opinion would not permit it. You, a stranger in the city, are held to have ill-used and abandoned the niece of the Mar-

chesa Guinigi." Nobili looked up; he was about to reply. "Pardon me, Count, I neither affirm nor deny this accusation," continued Guglielmi, observing his movement; "I am giving no opinion on the merits of the case. You have now espoused the lady. If for a second time you abandon her you will incur the increased indignation of the public. Reconsider, I implore you, this last resolve."

The lawyer's metallic voice grew positively pathetic.

"I will not reconsider it!" cried Count Nobili indignantly. "I deny your right to advise me. You have brought me into this room for no purpose that I can comprehend. What have I in common with the advocate of my enemy? I desire to leave Corellia. You are detaining me. Here is the deed of separation,"—Nobili drew from his breast-pocket the parchment he had perused so attentively in the chapel—"It only needs the lady's signature. Mine is already affixed. Let me tell you—and through you the Marchesa Guinigi, without that deed—and my own free will," he added in a lower tone, "neither you nor she would have forced me here to this marriage—I came because I considered some reparation was due to a young lady whose name has been cruelly outraged. Else I would have died first! If the lady I have made my wife desires to

make any amends to me for the insults that have been heaped upon me through her, let her set me free from an odious thraldom. I will not so much as look upon one who has permitted herself to be made the tool of others to deceive me. She has been treacherous to me in business—she has been treacherous to me in love—No, I will never look upon her again! Live with her—by God! Never!"

The pent-up wrath within him,—the maddening sense of wrong,—blaze out. Count Nobili is now striding up and down the room insensible to anything for the moment but the consciousness of his own outraged feelings.

As Count Nobili waxed furious, Maestro Guglielmi grew calm. His busy brain was concocting all sorts of expedients. He leant his chin upon his hands. His false smile gave place to a sardonic grin as he watched Nobili—marked his well-set, muscular figure, his easy movements, the graceful curve of his head and neck, his delicate regular features, his sunny complexion. But Nobili's face without a smile was shorn of its chief charm; that smile, so bright in itself, brought brightness to others.

"A fine generous fellow—a proper husband for any lady in Italy, whoever she may be," was Guglielmi's reflection, as he watched him. "The young Countess has taste. He is not such a fool

either, but desperately provoking—like all boys with large fortunes desperately provoking,—and dogged as a mule. But for all that he is a fine, generous-hearted fellow. I like him—I like him for refusing to be forced against his will. I would not live with an angel on such terms." At this point Guglielmi's eyes exhibited a succession of fireworks; his long teeth gleamed, and he smiled a stealthy smile. "But he must be tamed, this youth—he must be tamed. Let me see, I must take him on another tack—on the flank this time, and hit him hard!"

Nobili has now ceased striding up and down the room. He stands facing the window. His ear has caught the barking of several dogs. A minute after, one rushes past the window—raised only by a few stone steps from the ground—a formidable beast with long white hair, tail on end, ears erect, open-mouthed, fiery-eyed—this is Argo—Argo let loose, famished—maddened by Adamo's devices,—Argo rushing at full speed and tearing up a shower of gravel with his huge paws. Barking horribly, he disappears into the shrubs. Argo's bark is taken up by the other dogs from all round the house in various keys. Juno the lurcher gives a short low whelp; the rat-terrier Tuzzi a shrill grating whine like a rusty saw; the bull-terrier a deep growl. In

the solemn silence of the untrodden Apennines that rise around, the loud voices of the dogs echo from cliff to cliff, boom down into the abyss, and rattle there like thunder. The night-birds catch up the sound and screech; the frightened bats circle round wildly.

At this moment heavy footsteps creak upon the gravel under the shadow of the wall. A low whistle passes through the air, and the dogs disappear.

"A savage pack—like their mistress," was Count Nobili's thought as his eyes tried to pierce into the growing darkness.

Night is coming on. Heavy vapours creep up from the earth and obscure the air. Darker and denser clouds cover the heavens. Black shadows gather within the room. The bed looms out from the lighter walls like a funeral catafalque.

A few pale gleams of light still linger on the horizon. These fall upon Nobili's figure as he stands framed in the window. As the waning light strikes upon his eyes, a presentiment of danger comes over him. These dogs—these footsteps—what do they mean?

Again a wild desire seizes him to be riding full speed on the mountain road to Lucca—to feel the fresh night air upon his heated brow—the elastic spring of his good horse under him, each stride

bearing him further from his enemies. He is about to leap out and fly, when the warning hand of the lawyer is laid upon his arm. Nobili shakes him off, but Guglielmi permits himself no indication of offence. Dejection and grief are depicted on his countenance. He shakes his head despondingly; his manner is dangerously fawning. He, too, has heard the dogs, the footsteps, and the whistle. He has drawn his own conclusions.

"I perceive, Count Nobili," he says, "you are impatient."

This was in response to a muttered curse from Nobili.

"Let me go! A thousand devils!—Let me go!" cried the Count, putting the lawyer back. "Impatient! I am maddened!"

"But not before we have settled the matter in question. That is impossible! Hear me then, Count Nobili. With the deepest sorrow I accept the separation you demand on the part of the Marchesa —you give me no choice. I venture no further remark," continues Guglielmi meekly, drilling his eyes to a subdued expression.

(His eyes are a continual curse to him; sometimes they will tell the truth.)

"But there is one point, my dear Count, upon which we must understand each other."

In order to detain Nobili, Guglielmi is about to commit himself to a deliberate lie. Lying is not his practice; not on principle, for he has none. Expediency is his faith, pliancy his creed; lying is inartistic, also dangerous. A lie may grow into a spectre, and haunt you to your grave—perhaps beyond it.

Guglielmi felt he must do something decisive, or that exalted Personage who desired to avoid all scandal not connected with himself—would be irretrievably offended, and he, Guglielmi, would never sit on the judicial bench. Yet unscrupulous as he was the trickster shuddered at the thought of what that lie might cost him!

"It is my duty to inform you, Count Nobili,"—Guglielmi is speaking with pompous earnestness,—he anxiously notes the effect his words produce upon Count Nobili—"that, unless you remain under the same roof with your wife to-night, the marriage will not be completed, therefore no separation between you will be legal."

Nobili turned pale. He struck his fist violently on the table.

"What! a new difficulty? When will this torture end?"

"It will end to-morrow morning, Count Nobili. To-morrow morning I shall have the honour of

waiting upon you, in company with the Mayor of Corellia, for the civil marriage. Every requisition of the law will then have been complied with."

Maestro Guglielmi bows and moves towards the door. If by this means the civil marriage can be brought about, Guglielmi will have clinched a doubtful act into a legal certainty.

"A moment—Signor Avvocato,"—and Nobili is following Guglielmi to the door, consternation and amazement depicted upon his countenance—"Is this indeed so?"

Nobili's manner indicates suspicion.

"Absolutely so," answers the mendacious one. "To-morrow morning after the civil marriage, we shall be in readiness to sign the deed of separation. Allow me in the meantime to peruse it."

He holds out his hand. If all fails, he determines to destroy that deed and protest that he has lost it.

"Dio Santo!" ejaculates Nobili, giving the deed to him—"Twenty-four hours at Corellia!"

"Not twenty-four," suggests Guglielmi blandly, putting the deed into his pocket and taking out his watch with extraordinary rapidity, then replacing it as rapidly—"It is now seven o'clock. At nine o'clock to-morrow morning the deed of separation shall be signed, and you, Count Nobili, will be free."

CHAPTER X.

The Lawyer baffled.

At that moment Fra Pacifico's tall figure barred the doorway. He seemed to have risen suddenly out of the darkness. Nobili started back and changed colour. Of all living men, he most dreaded the priest at that particular moment. The priest was now before him—stern, grave, authoritative; searching him with those earnest eyes—the priest—a living protest against all he had done, against all he was about to do!

The agile lawyer darted forward. He was about to speak,—Fra Pacifico waved him into silence.

"Maestro Guglielmi," he said with that sonorous voice which lent importance to his slightest utterances, "I am glad to find you here. You represent the Marchesa. My son," he continued, addressing Count Nobili (as he did so, his face darkened into a look of mingled pain and displeasure), "I come from your wife."

At that word Fra Pacifico paused. Count Nobili reddened. His eyes fell upon the floor; he dared not meet the reproving glance he felt was upon him.

"My son, I come from your wife," repeated Fra Pacifico.

There was a dead silence.

"You saw your wife borne from the altar fainting. She was mercifully spared, therefore, hearing from your own lips that you repudiated her. She has since been informed by Cavaliere Trenta that you did so. I am here as her messenger. Your wife accepts the separation you desire."

As each sentence fell from the priest's lips his countenance grew sterner.

"Accepts the separation! Gives me up!" exclaimed Nobili quite taken aback—"So much the better. We are both of the same mind."

But spite of his words there was irritation and surprise in Nobili's manner. That Enrica herself should have consented to part from him was altogether an astonishment!

"If Countess Nobili accepts the separation," and he turned sharply upon Guglielmi, "nothing need detain you here, Signor Avvocato. You hear what Fra Pacifico says. You have only therefore to inform the Marchesa Guinigi. Probably her niece has already done so. We know that they act in concert." Count Nobili laughed bitterly.

"The Marchesa is not even aware that I am here," interposed Fra Pacifico. "Enrica is now

married—she acts for herself. Her first act, Count Nobili, is one of obedience—she sacrifices herself to you."

Again the priest's deep-set eyes turned reprovingly upon Count Nobili. Dare the headstrong boy affect to misunderstand that he had driven Enrica to renounce him? Guglielmi remained standing near the door—self-possessed indeed, as usual, but utterly crestfallen. His very soul sank within him as he listened to Fra Pacifico. Everything was going wrong. The judgeship in imminent peril, and this devil of a priest who ought to know better, doing everything to divide them!

"Signor Guglielmi," said Nobili with a significant glance at the open door, "allow me to repeat—we need not detain you. We shall now act for ourselves. Without reference to the difficulties you have raised——"

"The difficulties I have raised have been for your own good, Count Nobili," was Guglielmi's indignant reply. "Had I been supported by"—and he glanced at Fra Pacifico—"by those whose duty teaches them obedience to the ordinances of the Church, you would have saved yourself and others the spectacle of a matrimonial scandal that will degrade you before the eyes of all Italy."

Count Nobili was rushing forward, with some

undefined purpose of chastising Guglielmi, when Fra Pacifico interposed. A quiet smile parted his well-formed mouth; he shrugged his shoulders as he eyed the enraged lawyer.

"Allow me to judge of my duty as a priest. Look to your own as a lawyer, or it may be the worse for you. What says the motto?—'Those who seek gold may find sand.'"

Guglielmi, greatly alarmed at what Fra Pacifico might reveal of their previous conversation, waited to hear no more; he hastily disappeared. Fra Pacifico watched the manner of his exit with silence, the quiet smile of conscious power still on his lips. When he turned and addressed Count Nobili, the smile had died out.

Before Fra Pacifico could speak, the whole pack of dogs, attracted by the loud voices, gather round the steps before the open window. They are barking furiously, the smooth-skinned treacherous bull-dog is silent—but he stands foremost. True to his breed, the bull-dog is silent—he creeps in noiselessly—his teeth gleam within an inch of Nobili. Fra Pacifico spies him. With a furious kick he flings him out far over the heads of the others. The bull-dog's howl of anguish rouses the rest to frenzy. A moment more, and Fra Pacifico and Count Nobili would have been attacked within the very room, but again

footsteps are heard passing in the shadow—a shot is fired close at hand—the dogs rush off, the bull-dog whining and limping in the rear.

Count Nobili and Fra Pacifico exchange glances. There is a knock at the door. Pipa enters carrying a lighted lamp which she places on the table. Pipa does not even salute Fra Pacifico, but fixes her eyes, swollen with crying, upon Count Nobili.

"What is the matter?" asks the priest.

"Riverenza, I do not know. Adamo and Angelo are out watching."

"But, Pipa, it is very strange. A shot was fired. The dogs, too, are wilder than ever."

"Riverenza, I know nothing. Perhaps there are some deserters about. We are used to the dogs. I never hear them. I am come from the Signorina."

At that name Count Nobili looks up and meets Pipa's gaze. If Pipa could have stabbed him then and there with the silver dagger in her black hair she would have done it and counted it a righteous act. But she must deliver her message.

"Signor Conte,"—Pipa flings her words at Nobili as if each word were a stone, with which she would have hit him—"Signor Conte, the Marchesa sent me. The Marchesa bids me salute you. She desired me to bring in this light. It was to say supper is served in the great Sala. She eats in her

own room with the Cavaliere, and hopes you will excuse her."

Before the Count could answer Pipa was gone.

"My son," said Fra Pacifico, standing beside him in the dimly-lighted room, "you have now had time to reflect. Do you accept the separation offered to you by your wife?"

"I do, my father."

"Then she will enter a convent."—Nobili sighed heavily.—"You have broken her heart."

There was a depth of unexpressed reproach in the priest's look.—Tears gathered in his eyes, his deep voice shook.

"But why if she ever loved me,"—whispered Nobili into Fra Pacifico's ear as though he shrank from letting the very walls hear what he was about to say——

"If she loved you!" burst out Fra Pacifico with rising passion—"If she loved you! You have my word that she loved you—Nay, God help her, that she loves you still!"

Fra Pacifico drew back from Nobili as he said this. Again Nobili approached him, speaking into his ear.

"Why then, if she loved me, could she join with the Marchesa against me? Was I not induced by my love for her to pay her aunt's debts? Answer

me that, my father. Why did she insist upon this ill-omened marriage?—a proceeding as indelicate as it is——"

"Silence!" thundered Fra Pacifico—"silence, I command you! What you say of that pure and lovely girl whose soul is as crystal before me, is absolute sacrilege. I will not listen to it!"

Fra Pacifico's eyes flashed fire. He looked as if he would strike Count Nobili where he stood. He checked himself however; then he continued with more calmness,

"To become your wife was needful for the honour of Enrica's name, which you had slandered. The child put herself in my hands. I am responsible for this marriage—I only. As to the Marchesa do you think she consults Enrica? The hawk and the dove share not the same nest! No, no. Did the Marchesa so much as tell Enrica when she offered her as wife to Count Montalto?"

At the sound of Montalto's name Nobili's assumed composure utterly gave way. His whole frame stiffened with rage.

"Yes,—Montalto—curse him!—And I am the husband of the woman he refused!"

"For shame, Count Nobili!—you have yourself exonerated her."

"Enrica must have been an accomplice!" cried

Nobili transported out of himself. Count Montalto's name had exasperated him beyond control.

"Fool!" exclaimed Fra Pacifico. "Will you not listen to reason? Has not Enrica by her own act renounced all claim to you as a wife? Is not that enough?"

Nobili was silent. Hitherto he had been driven on, goaded by the promptings of passion, and the firm belief that Enrica was the mere tool of her aunt. Now the same facts detailed by the priest placed themselves in a new light. For the first time Nobili doubted whether he was entirely justified in all that he had done—in all that he was about to do!

Meanwhile Fra Pacifico was losing all patience. His manly nature rose within him at what he considered Nobili's deliberate cruelty. Inflexible in right, Fra Pacifico was violent in face of wrong.

"Why did you not let her die?" he exclaimed bitterly. "It would have saved her a world of suffering. I thought I knew you, Mario Nobili—knew you from a boy," he added, contemplating him with a dark scowl. "You have deceived me. Every word you utter only sinks you lower in my esteem."

"It would indeed have been better had we both perished in the flames!" cried Nobili in a voice full

of anguish—"Perished,—locked in each other's arms! Poor Enrica!"

He turned away, and a low sob burst from his heart of hearts.

"The Marchesa has destroyed my love!—She has blighted my life!" Nobili's voice sounded hollow in the dimly-lighted room. At last Nobili was speaking out—speaking as it were from the grave of his love! "Yes, I loved her," he continued dreamily—"I loved her! How much I did not know!"

He had forgotten he was not alone. The priest was but dimly visible. He was leaning against the wall, his massive chin resting on his hand, listening to Nobili. Now, hearing what he said, Fra Pacifico's anger had vanished. After all he had not been mistaken in his old pupil! Nobili was neither cruel nor heartless; but he had been driven to bay! Now he pitied him, profoundly. What could he say to him? He could urge Nobili no more. He must work out his own fate!

Again Nobili spoke.

"When I saw her sweet face turned towards me as she entered the Chapel, I dared not look again! It was too late. My pride as a man, all that is sacred to me as a gentleman, has been too deeply wounded. The Marchesa has done it. She alone

is responsible. *She* has left me no alternative. I will never accept a wife forced upon me by *her*—never, by Heaven! My father, these are my last words. Carry them to Enrica."

Count Nobili's head dropped upon his breast. He covered his face with his hands.

"My son, I leave you in the hands of God. May He lead you and comfort you! But remember, the life of your wife is bound up in *your* life. Hitherto Enrica has lived upon hope. Deprived of hope *she will die.*"

When Nobili looked up Fra Pacifico was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

Face to Face.

THE time had now come when Count Nobili must finally make up his mind. He had told Fra Pacifico that his determination was unaltered. He had told him that his dignity as a man,—his honour as a gentleman,—demanded that he should free himself from the network of intrigues in which the Marchesa had entangled him. Of all earthly things, compliancy with her desires most revolted him. Rather than live any longer the victim either of her malice or her ambition, he had brought himself to believe that it was his duty to renounce Enrica. Until Fra Pacifico had entered that room within which he was again pacing up and down with hasty strides, no doubt whatever had arisen in his mind as to what it was incumbent upon him to do. To give Enrica the protection of his name by marriage, —then to separate. Whether to separate in the manner pointed out by Guglielmi he had not decided. An innate repulsion, now increased by suspicion, made him distrust any act pressed upon him

by that man, especially when urged in concert with the Marchesa.

Every hour passed at Corellia was torture to him. Should he go at once?—Or should he remain until the morning?—Sign the deed?—Complete the sacrifice? Already what he had so loudly insisted on presented itself now to him in the light of a sacrifice. Enrica loved him still—he believed Fra Pacifico. The throbbing of his heart as he thought of her told him that he returned that love. She was there,—near him,—under the same roof. Could he leave her? Yes,—he must leave her. He would trust himself no longer in the hands of the Marchesa or of her agent. Instinct told him some subtle scheme lay under the urgings of Guglielmi—the dangerous civilities of the Marchesa. He would go. The legal separation might be completed elsewhere. Why only at Corellia? Why must those formalities insisted on by Guglielmi be respected? What did they mean? Of the real drift of the delay Nobili was utterly ignorant. Had he asked Fra Pacifico he would have told him the truth, but he had not done so.

To meet Enrica in the morning,—to meet her again in the presence of her detested aunt,—to meet her only to sign a deed separating them for

ever under the mockery of mutual consent,—was agony. Why should he endure it?

Nobili, wrought up to a pitch of excitement that almost robbed him of reason, dares not trust himself to think. He seizes his hat, which lay upon the table, and rushes out into the night. The murmur of voices comes dimly to him in the freshness of the air out of a window next his own. A circle of light shines on the glistening gravel before him. There must be people within—people watching him doubtless. As the thought crosses his mind he is suddenly pinned to the earth. Argo is watching for him—stealthy Argo—Argo springs upon him silently from behind—he holds him tightly in his grip. The dog made no sound, nor does he now, but he has laid Nobili flat on the ground. He stands over him, his heavy paws planted upon his chest,—his open jaws and dripping tongue close upon his face—so close Nobili feels the dog's hot breath upon his skin. Nobili cannot move,—he looks up fixedly into Argo's glaring bloodshot eyes. His steady gaze daunts the dog. In the very act of digging his big fangs into Nobili's throat Argo pauses—he shrinks before those human eyes before which the brutish nature quails. In an instant Nobili's strong hands close round his throat—He presses it until the powerful paws slacken in their

grip—until the fiery eyes are starting from their sockets.

Silent as is the struggle the other dogs are alarmed—they give tongue from different sides. Footsteps are rapidly approaching—the barrel of a gun gleams out of the darkness—a shot is fired. The report wanders off in endless reverberation among the rocks—another shot,—and another, in instant succession, answer each other from behind the villa.

With a grasp of iron Nobili holds back gallant Argo—Argo foaming at the mouth,—his white-coated chest heaving, as if in his last agony! Yet Argo is still immovable,—his heavy paws upon Nobili's chest pressing with all his weight upon him!

Now the footsteps have turned the corner! Dim forms already shape themselves in the night mist. The other dogs barking savagely are behind—they are coming—they are at hand! Ah! Nobili, what can you do now?—Nobili understands his danger. Quick as thought Nobili has dealt Argo a tremendous blow under the left ear. He seizes him by his milk-white hair so long and beautiful—he flings him against the low wall almost insensible. Argo falls a shapeless mass. He is stunned and motionless. Before the shadow of Adamo is upon him—

before the dogs' noses touch him—Nobili is on his feet. With one bound he has leapt through the window—the same from which the voices had come (it has been opened in the scuffle)—In an instant he closes the sash!—He is safe!

Coming suddenly out of the darkness,—after the great force he had put forth,—Nobili feels giddy and bewildered. At first he sees nothing but that there is a light in the centre of the room. As his eyes fix themselves upon it the light almost blinds him. He puts his hand to his forehead, where the veins had swollen out like cords upon his fair skin —he puts up his hands to shade his dazzled eyes before which clouds of stars dance desperately. He steadies himself and looks round.

Before him stands Enrica!

By Pipa's care the Bridegroom's chamber had been chosen next the Bride's when she prepared Count Nobili's room. (Pipa was straightforward and simple in her notions of matrimony, but, like a wise woman, she had held her tongue.)

Nobili and Enrica are alone.—A furtive glance passes between them. Neither of them moves—neither of them speaks. The first movement comes from Enrica. She sinks backwards upon a chair. The tangle of her yellow hair closes round her face upon which a deep blush had risen at sight of

Nobili. When that blush had died out she looked resigned, almost passionless. She knew that the moment had come which must decide her fate. Before they two parted she would hear from the lips of the man she loved if they were ever to meet again! Her eyes fell to the ground. She dared not raise them. If she looked at Nobili she must fling herself into his arms—

Nobili, standing on the same spot beyond the circle of the light, gazes at Enrica in silence. He is overwhelmed by the most conflicting emotions.—But the spell of her beauty is upon him. His pulses beat madly. For an instant he forgets where he is —he forgets all but that Enrica is before him. For a moment! Then his brain clears. He remembers everything—remembers—oh, how bitterly!—that, after all that has passed, his very presence in that room is an insult to her! He feels he ought to go, —yet an irresistible longing chains him to the spot. He moves towards the door. To reach it he must pass close to Enrica. When he is near the door he stops. The light shows that his clothes are torn,—that there is blood upon his face and hands. In scarcely articulate words Nobili addresses her.

"Enrica—Countess, I mean,"—Nobili hesitates —"Pardon this intrusion.—You saw the accident, —I did not know that this was *your* room."

Again Nobili pauses, waiting for an answer. None comes. Would she not speak to him? Alas! had he deserved that she should? Nobili takes a step or two towards the door. With one hand upon the lock he pauses once more, gazing at Enrica with lingering eyes. Then he turns to leave the room. It is all over!—He had only to depart!—A low cry from Enrica stops him.

"Nobili,"—Enrica says, "Tell me—oh! tell me, —are you hurt?"

Enrica has risen from the chair. One hand rests on the table for support. Her voice falters as she asks the question. Nobili, every drop of whose blood runs fevered in his veins, turns towards her.

"I am not hurt—a scratch or two—nothing."

"Thank God!" Enrica utters in a low voice.

Nobili endeavours to approach her. She draws back.

"As I am here—" he speaks with the utmost embarrassment—"Here, as you see by accident"—His voice rests on the words—"I cannot go——"

As Nobili speaks he perceives that Enrica gradually retreats further from him. The tender delight that had come into her eyes when he first addressed her fades out into a scared look—a look like a defenceless animal expecting to receive a death-

wound. Nobili sees and understands the expression.

His heart smites him sorely. Great God!—Has he become an object of terror to her?—

"Enrica!"—She starts back as Nobili pronounces her name, yet he speaks so softly the sound comes to her almost like a sigh. "Enrica—do not fear me. I will say no word to offend you.—I cannot go without asking your pardon. As one who loved you once—as one who loves——" He stops. What is he saying?—"I humbly beseech you to forgive me. Enrica—let me hear you say that you forgive me."

Still Enrica retreats from him, that suffering saint-like look upon her face he knows so well. Nobili follows her. He kneels at her feet. He kneels at the feet of the woman from whom, not an hour before, he had demanded a separation!

"Say—can you forgive me before I go?" As Nobili speaks his strong heart goes out to her in speechless longings. If Enrica had looked into his eyes they would have told her that he never had loved her as now! And they were parted!

Enrica puts out her hand timidly. Her lips move as if to speak, but no sound comes. Nobili rises; he takes her hand within both his own. He kisses it reverently.

"Dear hand—" he murmurs,—"And it was mine!"

Released from his, the dainty little hand falls to her side. She sighs deeply. There is the old charm in Nobili's voice—so sweet, so subtle. The tones fall upon her ear like strains of passionate music. A storm of emotion sweeps across her face. She has forgotten all in the rapture of his presence. Yes!—that voice! Had it not been raised but a few hours before at the altar to repudiate her?—How can she believe in him?—How surrender herself to the glamour of his words? Remembering all this, despair comes over her. Again Enrica shrinks from him. She bursts into tears and hides her face with her hands.

Enrica's distrust of him, her silence, her tears, cut Nobili to the soul. He knows he deserves it. Ah!—with her there before him, how he curses himself for ever having doubted her! Every justification suddenly leaves him. He is utterly confounded. The gossip of the Club—Count Montalto and his miserable verses—the Marchesa herself—what are they all beside the purity of those saint-like eyes? Nera too—false, fickle, sensual Nera—a mere thing of flesh and blood—he had left her for Nera! Was he mad?

At that moment, of all living men, Count Nobili

seemed to himself the most unworthy! He must go—he did not deserve to stay!

"Enrica,—before I leave you speak to me one word of forgiveness—I implore you!"

As he speaks their eyes meet. Yes, she is his own Enrica—unchanged, unsullied!—The idol is intact within its shrine—the sanctuary is as he had left it! No rude touch had soiled that atmosphere of purity and freshness that floated like an aureole around her!

How could he leave her?—If they must part he would hear his fate from her own lips. Enrica is leaning against the wall speechless, her face shaded by her hand. Big tears are trickling through her fingers. Unable to support herself she clings to a chair, then seats herself. And Nobili pale with passion stands by, and dares not so much as to touch her,—dares not touch her, although she is his wife!

In the fury of his self-reproach he digs his hands into the masses of thick chestnut curls that lie disordered about his head.

Fool, idiot!—Had he lost her? A terrible misgiving overcomes him. It fills him with horror. Was it too late? Would she never forgive him? Nobili's troubled eyes that wander all over her ask the question.

"Speak to me—speak to me!" he cries. "Curse me,—but speak to me!"

At this appeal Enrica turns her tear-bedewed face towards him.

"Nobili," she says at last very low,—"Would you have gone without seeing me?"

Nobili dares not lie to her. He makes no reply.

"Oh, do not deceive me, Nobili!" and Enrica wrings her hands and looks piteously into his face. "Tell me,—would you have come to me?"

It is only by a strong effort that Nobili can restrain himself from folding Enrica in his arms and in one burning kiss burying the remembrance of the miserable past. But he trembles lest by offending her the tender flower before him may never again expand to the ardour of his love. If Fra Pacifico has not by his arguments already shaken Nobili's conviction of the righteousness of his own conduct, the sight of Enrica utterly overcomes him.

"Deceive you!" he exclaims, approaching her and seizing her hands which she did not withdraw —"Deceive you! How little you read my heart!"

He holds her soft hands firmly in his — he covers them with kisses. Enrica feels the tender

pressure of his lips pass through her whole frame. But,—can she trust him?

"Did I not love you enough?" she asks, looking into his face. She gently disengages her hands from his grasp. There is no reproach in her look, but infinite sorrow. "Can I believe you?" And the soft blue eyes rest upon him full of pathetic pleading.

An expression of despair comes into Nobili's bright face. How can he answer her?—How can he satisfy her when he himself has shaken her trust?—Alas! would the golden past never come again?—The past tinted with the passion of ardent Summer?

"Believe me?" he cries in a tone of wildest passion. "Can you ask me?"

As he speaks he leans over her. Love is in his voice,—his eyes,—his whole attitude. Would she not understand him? Would she reject him?

Enrica draws back. She raises her hand in protest.

"Let me again,"—Nobili is following her closely —"Let me implore your forgiveness of my unmanly conduct."

She presses her hands to her bosom as if in pain, but not a sound comes to her lips.

"Believe me," he urges, "I have been driven mad by the Marchesa! It is my only excuse."

"Am I?"—Enrica answers. "Have I not suffered enough from my aunt?—What had she to do between you and me?—Did I love you less because she hated you? Listen, Nobili,"—Enrica with difficulty commands her voice, "From the first time we met in the cathedral I gave myself to you—you—you only."

"But Enrica—love—you consented to leave me. You sent Fra Pacifico to say so."

The thought that Enrica had so easily resigned him still rankled in Nobili's heart. Spite of himself there is bitterness in his tone.

Enrica is standing aloof from him. The light of the lamp strikes upon her golden hair, her downcast eyes, her cheeks mantling with blushes.

"I leave you!" A soft dew came into Enrica's eyes as she fixes them upon Nobili—a dew that rapidly formed itself into two tears that rolled silently down her cheek—"Never!—Never!"

Spite of the horrors of the past these words, that look, tell him she is his!—Nobili's heart leaps within him.—For a moment he is breathless,—speechless in the tumult of his great joy.

"Oh! my beloved," he cries in a voice that penetrates her very soul—"Come to me—here—

to a heart all your own!" He springs forward and clasps her in his arms—"Thus—thus let the past perish!" Nobili whispers as his lips touch hers. Enrica's head nestled upon his breast. She has once more found her home.

* * * * * *

A subdued knock is heard at the door.

"Sangue di Dio!" mutters Nobili disengaging himself from Enrica—"What new torment is this? Is there no peace in this house? Who is there?"

"It is I, Count Nobili,"—Maestro Guglielmi puts in his hatchet face and glaring teeth. In an instant his piercing eyes have travelled round the room. He has taken in the whole situation—Count Nobili in the middle of the floor—flushed—agitated—furious at this interruption; Enrica,—revived,—conscious,—blushing at his side. The investigation is so perfectly satisfactory Maestro Guglielmi cannot suppress a grin of delight.

"Believe me, Signor Conte," he says advancing cautiously a step or two forward into the room, a deprecating look on his face—"Believe me,—this intrusion"—Guglielmi turns to Enrica, grins again palpably, then bows—"is not of my seeking."

"Tell me instantly what brings you here?" demands Nobili advancing. (Nobili would have liked

beyond measure to have relieved his feelings by kicking him.)

"It is just that"—Guglielmi cannot refrain from another glance round before he proceeds—("Yes, they are reconciled—no doubt of it. The judgeship is his own! Evviva! The illustrious Personage, — so notoriously careful of his subjects' morals,—who had deigned to interest himself in the marriage, might possibly, at the birth of a son and heir to the Guinigi, add a pension—who knows?" At this reflection the lawyer's eyes become altogether unmanageable.)—"It is just that," repeats Guglielmi, making a desperate effort to collect himself—"Personally I should have declined it—personally; — but the Marchesa's commands were absolute.—'You must go yourself—I will permit no deputy.'"

"Damn the Marchesa! Shall I never be rid of the Marchesa?"

Nobili's aspect is becoming menacing. Maestro Guglielmi is not a man easily daunted; yet once within the room, and the desired evidence obtained, he cannot but feel all the awkwardness of his position. Greatly as Guglielmi had been tickled at the notion of becoming himself a witness in his own case, to do him justice he would not have volunteered it.

"The Marchesa sent me," he stammers, conscious of Count Nobili's indignation — (With his arms crossed Count Nobili is eyeing Guglielmi from head to foot.) "The Marchesa sent me to know——"

Nobili unfolds his arms, walks straight up to where Guglielmi is standing, and shakes his fist in his face.

"Do you know, Signor Avvocato, that you are committing an intolerable impertinence? If you do not instantly quit this room, or give me some excellent reason for remaining, you shall very speedily have my opinion of your conduct in a very decided manner."

Count Nobili is decidedly dangerous. He glares at Guglielmi like a very devil. Guglielmi falls back—the false smile is upon his lips, but his treacherous eyes express his terror. Guglielmi's combats are only with words,—his weapon the pen; otherwise he is powerless.

"Excuse me, Count Nobili—excuse me," he stammers. He rubs his hands nervously together and watches Nobili, who is following him step by step. "It is not my fault—I give you my word—not my fault. Don't look so, Count—you really alarm me.—I am here as a man of peace—I entreated the Marchesa to retire to rest. I represented

to her the peculiar delicacy of the position—but I grieve to say she insisted."

Nobili is now close to him; his eyes are gathered upon him more threateningly than ever.

"Remember, sir, you are addressing me in the presence of my wife—be careful."

What a withering look Nobili gives Guglielmi as he says this! He can with difficulty keep his hands off him!

"Yes,—yes—just so—just so—I applaud your sentiments, Count Nobili—most appropriate.—Now I will go."

Alarmed as he is, Guglielmi cannot resist one parting glance at Enrica. She is crimson. Then, with an expression of infinite relief he retreats to the door walking backwards. Guglielmi has a strong conviction that if he turns round Count Nobili may kick him,—so, keeping his eyes well balanced upon him, he fumbles with his hands behind his back to find the handle of the door.—In his confusion he misses it.

"Not for worlds, Signor Conte," says Guglielmi nervously passing his hand up and down the panel in search of the door-handle—"Not for worlds would I offend you! Believe me——(Maledictions on the door—it is bewitched!")

Now Guglielmi has it! Safely clutching the

handle with both his hands Guglielmi's courage returns. His mocking eyes look up without blinking into Nobili's—fierce and flashing as they are.

"Before I go,"—he bows with affected humility —"Will you favour me, Count—and you, Madam" (Guglielmi is clutching the door-handle tightly, so as to be able to escape at any moment) "by informing me whether you still desire the deed of separation to be prepared for your signature in the morning?"

"Leave the room!" roars Count Nobili stamping furiously on the floor—"Leave the room—or, Domine Dio!——"

Maestro Guglielmi had jumped out backwards, before Count Nobili can finish the sentence.

"Enrica!" cries Nobili turning towards her — he had banged to the door and locked it,—"Enrica, if you love me, let us leave this accursed villa to-night! This is more than I can bear!"

What Enrica replied—or if Enrica ever replied at all is—and ever will remain—a mystery!

CHAPTER XII.

Oh Bello!

An hour or two has passed. A slow and cautious step, accompanied with the tapping of a stick upon the stone flags of the floor, is audible along the narrow passage leading from the Sala to Pipa's room. It is as dark as pitch. Whoever it is, is afraid of falling, and creeps along cautiously, feeling by the wall.

Pipa expecting to be summoned to her mistress, —Pipa wondering greatly indeed what Enrica can be about,—and why she does not go to bed, when she, the blessed dear, was so faint and tired, and crying, oh! so pitifully when she left her,—Pipa, leaning against the door-post near the half-open door, dozing like a dog with one eye open in case she should be called,—listened and looked out into the passage. A figure is standing within the light that streams out from the door, a very well-remembered figure, stout and short,—a little bent forward on a stick,—with a round rosy face framed in snowy curls,—a world of pleasant wickedness in

two twinkling eyes on which the light strikes, and a mouth puckered up for any mischief.

"Madonna!" cries Pipa rubbing her eyes—"The Cavaliere! How you did frighten me! I cannot bear to hear footsteps about when Adamo is out;" and Pipa gazes up and down into the darkness with an unpleasant consciousness that something ghostly might be watching her.

"Pipa," says the Cavaliere, putting his finger to his nose and winking palpably—"Hold your tongue and don't scream when I tell you something. Promise me."

"Oh Gesù!" cries Pipa in a loud voice, starting back, forgetting his injunction—"Is it not about the Signorina?"

"Hold your tongue, Pipa, or I will tell you nothing."

Pipa's head is instantly close to the Cavaliere's, her face all eagerness.

"Yes, it is about the Signorina—the Countess. She is gone!"

"Gone!" and Pipa, spite of warning, fairly shouts now—"Gone!"—at which the Cavaliere shook his stick at her, smiling however benignly all the time. "Holy Mother! gone! Oh, Cavaliere! tell me—she is not dead?"

(Ever since Pipa had tended Enrica lying on

her bed, so still and cold, it seemed reasonable to her that she might die at any instant, without warning given.)

"Yes, Pipa," answers the Cavaliere solemnly, his voice shaking slightly, but he still smiled, though the dew of rising tears is in his merry eyes—"Yes, dead—dead to us, my Pipa—I fear dead to us."

Pipa sank back in speechless horror against the wall and groaned.

"But only to us—(don't be a fool, Pipa)"—this in a parenthesis—"She is gone with her husband."

Pipa rose to her feet and stared at Trenta—at first wildly—then as little by little the hidden sense came to her, her rosy lips slowly part and lengthen out until every snowy tooth is visible. Then Pipa covers her face with her apron, and shakes from head to foot in such a fit of laughter, she had to lean against the wall not to fall down. "Oh bello!" was all she could say. This Pipa repeats at intervals in gasps.

"Come, Pipa, that will do," says the Cavaliere poking at her with his stick—"I must get back before I am missed—no one must know it till morning—least of all the Marchesa and Guglielmi. They are shut up together. The Marchesa says she will sit up all night. But Count Nobili and his wife are gone—really gone. Fra Pacifico managed it.

He got hold of Adamo who was running round the house with a loaded gun, all the dogs after him. Take care of Adamo when he comes back to-night, Pipa. He is fastening up the dogs, and feeding them, and taking care of poor Argo, who is badly hurt. He is quite mad, Adamo. I never saw a man so wild. He would not come in. He said the Marchesa had told him to shoot some one. He swore he would do it yet. He nearly fought with Fra Pacifico when he forced him in. Adamo is quite mad. Tell him nothing to-night; he is not safe."

Pipa had now let down her apron. Her bright olive-complexioned face beams in one broad smile, like the full moon at harvest. She is still shaking, and at intervals gave little spasmodic giggles.

"Leave Adamo to me" (another giggle), "I will manage him" (another). "Why, he might have shot the Signorina's husband—the fool!"

This thought steadied Pipa for an instant, but she bursts out again.

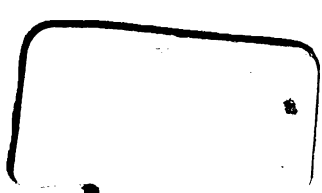
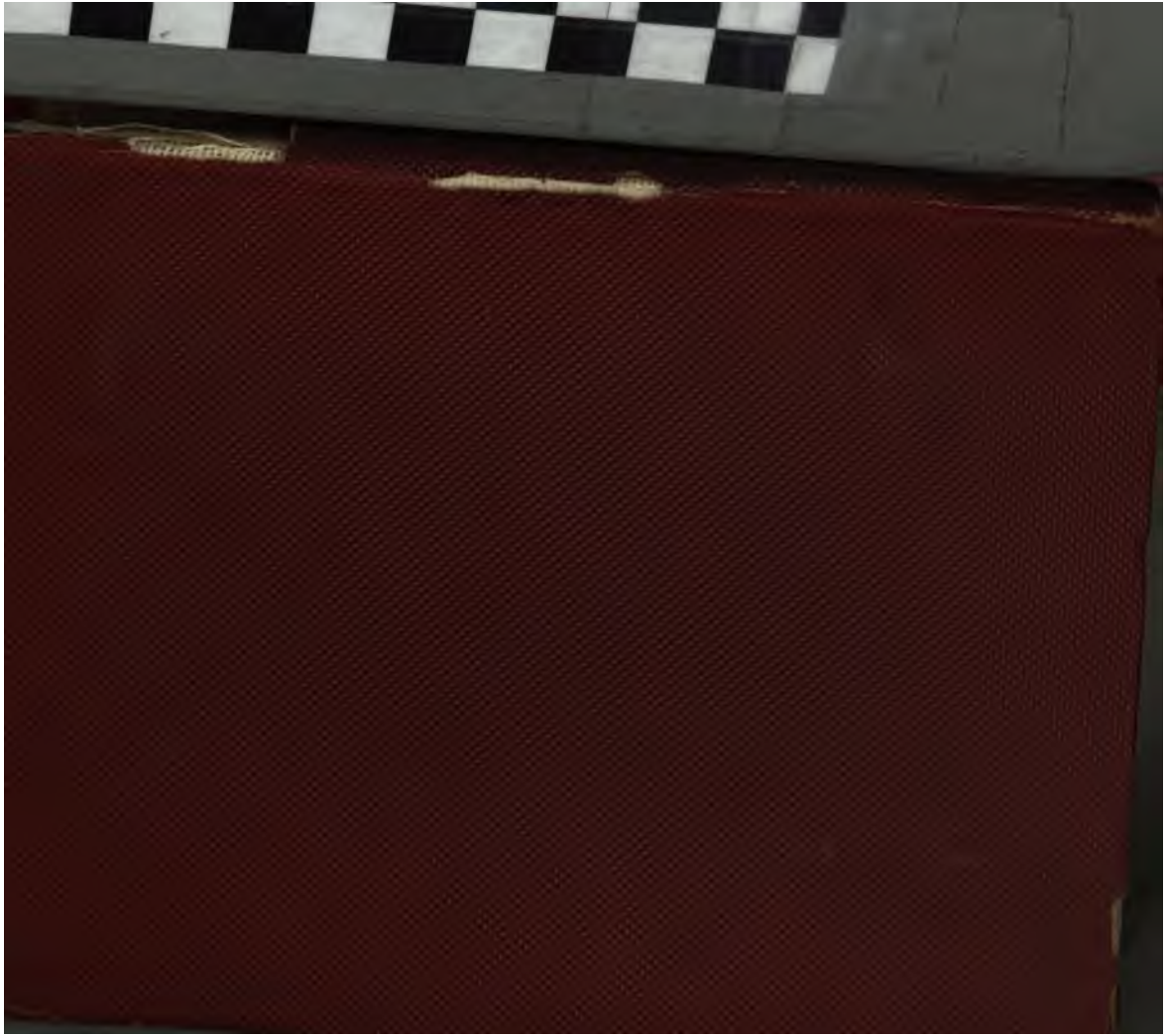
"Oh bello!"—Pipa gurgles like a stream that cannot stop running; then she breaks off all at once, and listens. "Hush! hush! There is Adamo coming, Cavaliere—hush, hush! Make haste and go away. He is coming—Adamo; I hear him on the gravel."

"Say nothing until the morning," whispers the Cavaliere. "Give them a fair start. Ha! ha!"

Pipa nods. Her face twitches all over. As Cavaliere Trenta turns to go Pipa catches him smartly by the shoulder, draws him to her, and speaks into his ear:

"To think the Signorina has run away with her own husband! Oh bello!"

THE END.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

P 68